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# School Leaders' Levels of Political Engagement with the Policy Environments Surrounding Their Professional Roles

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SCHOOL LEADERS' LEVELS OF POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT WITH THE  
POLICY ENVIRONMENTS SURROUNDING THEIR PROFESSIONAL ROLES

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A Dissertation  
Presented to  
the Graduate School of  
Clemson University

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Educational Leadership

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by  
Seth D. Young  
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Accepted by:  
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## ABSTRACT

Policymakers at the federal, state, and local levels rely upon school and district leaders to implement educational policies with fidelity. However, such policies are not often implemented as intended due to a variety of potential factors, including school leaders' lack of engagement in policy development.

This study addresses the critical, yet understudied, role of school leaders and their levels of political engagement in a state located in the southeastern United States. Specifically, this quantitative study of 358 public school leaders in this specific state examined the extent to which school leaders are, in fact, engaged with the policy environments that surround their professional roles as educational leaders and the extent to which specific demographic variables are associated with a school leader's political engagement.

The state's traditionalistic political culture (Elazar, 1984), combined with its unique history of education policy, would indicate the potential for demographic variables to predict whether or not a school leader was politically engaged within the policy environments surrounding his or her professional role. After conducting an exploratory factor analysis to determine factors that comprise political engagement for this study, a multiple regression analysis was used to determine if demographic variables are associated with a school leader's levels of political engagement. It was determined that demographic variables were not strong predictors of school leaders' levels of engagement with policies that impact their role as a principal or assistant

principal as theories of political participation and political culture would predict.

## DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my wife, Ashley. Thank you, Ashley, for all of your support and encouragement. Thank you for putting the kids to bed on those late nights when I had class or was in the office trying to write. You have been my biggest supporter through this entire process. I cannot put into words how much I appreciate you. I love you and work to make you proud every day. Thank you to my son, Grant, and daughter, Lydia. I could not have been blessed with two better kids. Grant and Lydia, I appreciate how easy you made things on your mom during this entire process. Thank you to my parents, Buddy and Jane, who have always encouraged me from a young age to strive to do great things. Thank you, Mom and Dad, for teaching me not to settle for mediocrity.

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# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Interaction between policymakers and school leaders is necessary to provide an adequate understanding of the needs and desires of each group in the process of developing and implementing education policy (Spillane et al., 2002). This is especially true when the process of policymaking is approached using rational choice theory (Fowler & Kam, 2007; Sabatier, 2007). According to theories of political participation, individuals are more likely to participate politically and interact with policymakers when they feel that the policymakers at least value and are willing to listen to their perspectives about specific policy interests (Cohen, Moffitt, & Goldin, 2007; Vigoda, 2002; Whitely & Seyd, 2002).

McLaughlin (1990) stated that policies can best achieve the goals of policymakers when all stakeholders understand the desired outcomes of policymakers, and those asked to implement the policies are inspired to help work towards those stated goals. As state and federal governments have become more involved in the policy environments surrounding public education, the interaction between policymakers and school leaders has led to a tenser and less productive relationship due to a lack of understanding and a possible lack of engagement from school leaders who are expected to implement policy (Boyd & Crowson, 2002; Cohen & Moffitt, 2011).

Education policy “depends on the ability of schools and districts to enact policies, and this is most effectively done through collaboration among superintendents, building administrators, boards, and community members” (Sherman, 2008, p. 677). All stakeholders, including school level administrators, involved in the education of a community’s children must be able to interpret effectively the meaning of local, state, and federal policy in order for the policy to be implemented effectively (Brewer, 2011; Marks & Nance, 2007; Sherman, 2008). As noted by Frick and Faircloth (2007), "Policymakers must give increased attention to the implementation process of current and future policies" (p. 28).

Local, state, and federal policies all influence an educational leader’s job, and policymakers at all three levels expect school leaders to implement these policies as anticipated (Desimone, 2006; Frick & Faircloth, 2007). When state and federal governments enact policies, they do so with the assumption that the policies will be implemented with fidelity in order to achieve the intended outcome (Marks & Nance, 2007). As Spillane and Kenney (2012) stated, "Local school districts and schoolhouses, despite the ramped up federal and state incentives and sanctions, continue to be where the rubber of education policy meets the road of school improvement, though incentives and support do vary by state" (p. 546).

Misunderstanding and distrust can develop due to a lack of interaction between policymakers and implementers of policy (Desimone, 2006). However, oftentimes,

policymakers' aims and goals are perceived to be conflicting with those of educators because of a lack of resources, a lack of understanding, or inconsistent policy implementation (Brewer, 2011; Bryk, 2015; Cohen et al., 2007; Fuhrman et al., 2007; Spillane, 2008; Spillane & Kenney, 2012; Tyack & Tobin, 1994).

### **Problem Definition**

The purpose of this study is to identify behaviors that could potentially help school leaders eliminate frustration with education policy and be able to more effectively implement policy with fidelity (CCSSO, 2011; Cohen et al., 2007). As school leaders become more engaged in the policy environments that impact their professional responsibilities, they are able to interpret and implement policies more consistently with the intentions of policymakers (Brewer, 2011; Cohen & Moffitt, 2011; Louis & Robinson, 2012; Spillane & Kenney, 2012) which could potentially lead to increased student achievement. Nevertheless, school leaders' participation may be hampered due to "tensions over degrees of professional and public participation [that] have been documented from schoolhouses to school boards to state houses and the U.S. Congress" (Lindle & Mawhinney, 2003, p. 322).

Over the last several decades, the role of the principal has become more politicized as state and federal governments have devoted more resources to public education (Verstegen, 2011) and more time to developing policies that impact public education. Policymakers delegate the responsibility to district and school leaders to



implement policies consistently and with fidelity, but for a variety of reasons that are discussed in this study, policies are not always implemented as policymakers intend. Febey and Louis (2008) noted "States have struggled to find the appropriate policy mechanisms to influence teaching and learning--the core of educational policy, but also the most difficult and resistant to change from outside the school" (p. 55). This phenomenon is possibly due to the lack of engagement from school level administrators with policies that are intended to impact teaching and learning that principals are asked to implement (Honig & Hatch, 2004).

At least one southeastern state of the U. S. has a poor relationship between policymakers and public educators (Brewer et al., 2015; Werts et al., 2013). Given the potential policy resistance signified by such policymaker and educator tensions (Brewer et al.; Werts et al.), questions may be raised about the condition of any role school level administrators have in the development and implementation of education policies. By being politically engaged, school leaders could possibly eliminate some of the frustration that exists within the policy environments influencing public education (Carpenter & Brewer, 2014; Cohen et al., 2007).

Under the rational approach to policy implementation, school leaders are to accurately implement and interpret policies levied at the various policy environments surrounding their professional roles through the hierarchy of school leadership (Ball, 1998; Bryk, 2015; Koyama, 2014). This hands-on policy role can be viewed as what

Weatherly and Lipsky (1977) termed a *street-level bureaucrat*, a term that, more than four decades later, still depicts both district level and school level leaders' roles in policy implementation (Honig, 2006, 2012; Koyama, 2014; O'Laughlin & Lindle, 2015; Wenner & Settlage, 2015). As street-level bureaucrats, school leaders exist in an interesting dynamic that requires significant political leadership within the school and community (Lipsky, 1977; O'Laughlin & Lindle, 2015; Weatherly & Lipsky, 1977). Despite the important role school leaders play in the interpretation and implementation of education policies, their levels of political engagement as part of the policy implementation process have not received scholarly attention in depth (Spillane et al., 2002; Wenner & Settlage, 2015).

Until 2015, the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) provided standards that helped to describe the role of the principal included Political Leadership (Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO], 2008; CCSSO, 2011). However, these standards have been altered and Political Leadership is no longer listed as one of the leadership standards for school leaders (Lindle, 2015; National Policy Board for Education Administration [NPBEA], 2015). By removing this standard, the standards that describe the role of the principal no longer highlight the need for school leaders to be politically engaged. However, when school leaders are politically engaged, they are better able to interpret and implement policies (Brewer, 2011; Cohen & Moffitt, 2011; Louis & Robinson, 2012; Spillane & Kenney, 2012).

## **Purpose of Study**

Given that limited research about school leaders' perceptions of their levels of engagement within their state and local public education policy environments, the purpose of this study is to determine the level of engagement with the different policy environments affecting their roles as building level administrators. A variety of variables such as socioeconomic status, ethnicity, education, and civic skills predict an individual's willingness to participate politically (Cantijoch, Cutts, & Gibson, 2011; Fowler & Kam, 2007; Whitely & Seyd, 2002), but this kind of investigation has focused on citizens generally or groups other than school-level leaders (Carpenter & Brewer, 2014). Therefore, it is also important to examine any correlation that may exist between such demographic variables and school leaders' levels of political engagement.

As implementers of policies written at the local, state, and federal levels of government (Louis & Robinson, 2012; Tyack & Tobin, 1994), school leaders need an understanding of the policy background and intent (McDermott, 2003), which may come from awareness or active engagement in policy development (Brewer 2011; Carpenter & Brewer 2014; Koyama, 2014). In order to be effectively engaged, citizens, in general, must be knowledgeable about policies before they can effectively participate in behaviors such as contacting policymakers (Abdelzadeh, et al., 2015; Hays, 2015; Reichert, 2016).

School leaders must be knowledgeable and understand policies that affect their professional role as educational leaders in order to effectively influence policy decisions and advocate for the appropriate resources to carry out the aims of policy (Coburn, 2016; McLaughlin, 1990; O'Day, 2002). Carpenter and Brewer (2014) stated "principals are asked to become active in the democratic and administrative channels at the district, state, and federal levels in order to influence the larger context" (p. 300). However, administrators cannot influence policy decisions without being engaged in the arenas where education policy develops (Louis & Robinson, 2012). These education policies impact instruction, funding, curriculum, and a variety of other aspects of public education. Thus, this study highlights an imperative need to better understand school leaders' levels of engagement in policy development (Carpenter & Brewer, 2014; Hampshire, 2016; O'Laughlin & Lindle, 2015).

A policy's environment includes the political context in which it was created along with the educational environment in which it is implemented (Cohen et al., 2007). Policy environments include arenas at the local, state, and federal level (Goertz, 2005; Koyama, 2014; Mazzoni, 1991, 1994; Spillane & Kenney, 2012). By being more engaged with policy, administrators can influence the implementation of policies to be more consistent with desired goals and create more buy in among those directly impacted by policy (Bryk, 2015; Honig & Hatch, 2004; Louis &

Febey, 2012; Sabatier, 1991). However, policies continue to be implemented inconsistently (Cohen et al., 2007), and school leaders' political engagement is not known.

Finally, this study highlights the unique perspectives of educators in a state located in the southeastern United States which has a particular political culture that has historically influenced the education policy environments and implementation as state and local levels (Brewer, Knoeppel, & Lindle, 2015; Hampshire, 2016; Lindle & Hampshire, 2017; Truitt, 2009; Werts et al., 2013). According to Elazar's (1984) conceptualization of political culture, this state has a traditionalistic political culture because of the dominant political elite combined with a lack of strong grassroots organization and fragmentation among local civic organizations (Lindle & Hampshire, 2017). As a state with a traditionalistic political culture, perceptions continue to exist that this southeastern state has been dominated historically by an elite group who attempt to maintain control of the politics of the state in order to benefit their own personal interests rather than the good of the state (Brewer et al., 2015).

The state's school leaders' perceptions about their engagement with policy development and policymakers currently is unknown. If they are not engaged, as Elazar's (1984) traditionalistic political culture and other research (Brewer et al., 2015; O'Laughlin & Lindle, 2015; Lindle & Hampshire, 2017; Werts et al., 2013) would predict, such disengagement may explain the enactment of education policies which

generate unintended consequences or lack sufficient resources required for any implementation fidelity. Therefore, school leaders' engagement with policies that impact their professional roles should be researched.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Because of the unique role a building level administrator has in the hierarchy of policy development and implementation, this study uses a conceptual framework that illustrates the school leader's assumed role in political engagement. As street-level bureaucrats, school leaders play a vital role in policy interpretation at the school level and can impact the success or failure of policies by advocating for appropriate resources and the appropriate uses of those resources (Ball, 1998; Honig & Hatch, 2004; Lindle, 2014; Lindle & O'Laughlin, 2015; O'Laughlin, 2013).

According to theories of political participation, a variety of variables such as socioeconomic status, education, and their civic skills predict an individual's willingness to participate politically (Brady, Verba, & Schlozman, 1995; Fowler & Kam, 2007; Whitely & Seyd, 2002). The traditionalistic political culture in the state where the study takes place also frames the role of the school leader in a context that historically has placed the balance of power with a historical, social, and political elite that often does not include educators (Lindle & Hampshire, 2017). By being engaged with the policy environments that impact their professional role, school leaders can help influence policymakers' development of more effective and efficient policies that would hopefully lead to higher student achievement (Carpenter & Brewer, 2014; Honig & Hatch, 2004).

### **Research Questions**

Since little is known about the school leaders' perceptions of their engagement

with the policy environments that surround public education in the state in which the study was conducted, this study attempted to answer the following questions:

- What is the extent to which school leaders in a selected southeastern U.S. state perceive their levels of political engagement with the policy environments surrounding their professional roles?
- What demographic variables predict school leaders' perceptions about their levels of political engagement with the policy environments surrounding their professional roles in a state located in the southeastern United States?

### **Research Design**

This quantitative study sought answers about principals' and assistant principals' perceived engagement within policy environments that impact public education in a selected state located in the southeastern United States. Given the state-based nature and variance within U.S. education policies (Brewer et al., 2015; Goertz, 2005; Koyama, 2014; Mazzoni, 1994; McDermott, 2003), many quantitative studies, such as Gall, Gall, and Borg (2006), Kowalski et al. (2011), and Willman (2015) have been used to research policy decisions. This non-experimental cross-sectional research study used survey data to collect school leaders' perceived levels of engagement in politics and policy from the state to school levels. (Creswell, 2009). Using an exploratory factor analysis, demographic variables were analyzed to determine to what extent they predicted a school leader's political engagement (Costello & Osborne, 2005).

## **Definition of Terms**

**Administration experience.** Among the variables which offered a potential effect on individual school leaders' perceptions, the variable of administrative experience was defined as the number of years a school leader had been in an administrative role. Sloam (2015) indicated that age and experience can predict an individual's likelihood to participate in behaviors indicative of a person who is politically engaged.

**Education experience.** Because Sloam (2015) indicated age and experience can have an effect on a person's political participation, school leaders were asked about their professional experience. The variable of education experience was defined as the number of years a school leader had been employed as an educator. School leaders were also asked to provide their years of experience in education to see if there was any difference in a school leader's perceived levels of political engagement based on that individual's number of years as an educator.

**Ethnicity.** School leaders were also asked to indicate their ethnicity for this study by selecting one of the following choices: (a) American Indian or Alaska Native, (b) Asian, (c) Black or African American, (d) Hispanic, (e) Native Hawaiian, (f) Two or More Races, (g) White, or (h) Other. Ethnicity is another variable which previous research on theories of political participation and political culture has been shown to predict a person's likelihood to participate in behaviors that would indicate political



engagement (Cantijoch et al., 2011; Kofod, Louis, Moos, & van Velzen, 2012; Whitely & Seyd, 2002).

**Implementation with Fidelity.** When policy implantation is approached using the rational policy theory, interaction and engagement between stakeholders within the policy environments leads to more efficient policy implementation. Policies are implemented with fidelity with those called to implement policies utilize the resources provided by policymakers to implement the policy as intended (Cohen et al., 2007). Bryk (2015) noted the importance of understanding policy within the implementation process.

**Gender.** In this study of professional educators, the demographic variable of biological sex was offered as a two-option forced choice among demographic variables. The nuances of gender-identity and sex often are conflated in surveys. For this population of educators, a group sensitive to ranges in cultural values and typically conservative in their responses, the term gender was substituted for sex in the survey options (Dalton, 2014; Fowler & Kam, 2007).

**Location.** Location and access to resources is another variable that has been shown to influence an individual's likelihood to be politically engaged (Dalton, 2014; Fowler & Kam, 2007; Vigoda, 2002). Specifically, in the state where this study took place, students from specific schools and school districts have historically not performed as well academically compared to students from other areas of the state (Brewer et al.,

2015; Hein, 2017; Wert et al., 2013). School leaders were asked to provide their zip code in order to determine their location within the state.

**Percent of students on free or reduced-price meals.** School leaders provided the percentage of students receiving free or reduced lunch at their schools. Socio-economic status and access to resources has been shown to be a predictor of an individual's likelihood to be politically engaged in research on theories of political participation (Whitely & Seyd, 2002; Vigoda, 2002). Previous research on the history of the state's education policies and student achievement indicates that students from families and communities with lower socio-economic status historically achieve at lower rates compared to students that do not receive free or reduced price meals (Brewer et al., 2015; Truitt, 2009; Wert et al., 2013).

**Political culture.** Elazar (1980) defined political culture as the enduring political attitudes and behaviors associated with groups that live in a defined geographical context. Political culture impacts how people view what is expected from government and who may engage in the political process (Elazar, 1980; 1984; Fitzpatrick & Hero, 1988).

**Political Engagement.** For this study, engagement was defined as a school leader's knowledge about policies created at the local, state, or federal level and their participation in specific behaviors such as voting, contacting policymakers at the local, state, or federal level, reading about political trends in public education, and attending

professional development opportunities about policies from various policy environments. The population of this study consists of school leaders within the state. School leaders answered questions about their own behaviors that are indicative of being politically engaged.

**School leaders.** At the building level, a variety of educational leadership roles and positions have emerged over the past few decades in the U.S. The most common school-level leadership roles include principals and assistant principals. As such, in this study, the term school leaders refers to principals and assistant principals.

**Street-level bureaucrat.** As part of the process of policy interpretation and implementation, school leaders are in the role Lipsky (1977) defined as a street-level bureaucrat, which is someone who is both responsible for implementing a policy and being impacted by a policy.

### **Significance**

Many scholars have investigated the level of school leaders' involvement in the policy implementation processes (Honig, 2006, 2012; Koyama, 2014; McLaughlin, 1990). Yet, only a few research studies report the degree to which school-level leaders engage in the political or policy development processes (Brewer, 2011; Carpenter & Brewer, 2014). The school leader's role in the interpretation and implementation is important especially when approached using rational choice theory (Kingdon, 2003). Theories of political participation would also indicate the potential that demographic variables could influence the degree to which school leaders would be politically engaged (Fowler & Kam, 2007; Whitely & Seyd, 2002).

The implementation studies reveal micro-level adaptations that school leaders make as street-level bureaucrats (Honig, 2006; Koyama, 2014; O’Laughlin & Lindle, 2014). These series of studies illuminate a gap between the school leaders’ involvement in policy design and their implementation roles. The results of this study could be used to continue the discussion among stakeholders affected by this state’s education policy that focuses on eliminating potential obstacles in the education policy environment in this state and in other states with comparable political cultures (Cohen et al., 2007).

Research on this topic could impact teachers and students, which could eventually lead to improved student achievement through all stakeholders working together to eliminate obstacles between policymakers and building level educational leaders to ensure education policies are implemented with fidelity or adapted with fidelity to scale and intent (Brewer, 2011; Bryk, 2015; Louis & Robinson, 2012; Koyama, 2014; Spillane & Kenney, 2012). Further research could be conducted to analyze the perceptions policymakers have about educational leaders' engagement in various policy environments. The instrument and study design could also be replicated to gauge if educational leaders in other areas of the United States have similar perceptions about the policy environments surrounding public education.

## **Summary**

As a school leader in the state where this study was conducted, I have a unique perspective of the political culture that exist and plays a role in the development of education policy in this state. I also have an understanding of the roles school leaders play in the implementation of policies created at the local, state, and federal levels.

This study examined school-level leaders' perceptions about their extent of political engagement, including a set of demographic variables which could predict their engagement. The study is divided into five chapters. In chapter one, a brief introduction to the study, including background information, and a definition of terms used throughout the study. Chapter two provides a thorough review of the literature including an in depth discussion of the roles school leaders play in the interpretation and implementation of policies intended to impact public education and the conceptual framework used for this study. Chapter three focuses on the quantitative research design and the methods used to complete the study. Chapter four provides a review of the study's findings and a discussion about the process used to conduct the exploratory factor analysis and multiple regression analysis on whether demographic variables predict a school leader's political engagement. Finally, a summary of the study, a discussion of the findings, and implications for future research are included in Chapter five.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

School leaders' engagement in policy is necessary, yet the extent to which they are engaged in both policy development and implementation has not been adequately studied (Spillane et al., 2002; Spillane & Kenney, 2012). Theories of citizens' political participation indicate that variables such as an individual's socioeconomic status, level of education, ethnicity, and political efficacy can predict an individual's willingness to participate and be politically engaged (Cantijoch et al., 2011; Whitely & Seyd, 2002). Yet, it is also not known how demographic variables, such as location and ethnicity, could predict the levels of engagement among school leaders from a single southeastern state in the U.S.

This chapter begins with a review of literature highlights the important role school leaders have in the development and implementation of education policy and the need for these individuals to be engaged politically with the policies that impact their professional roles as educational leaders (Honig & Hatch, 2004; Louis & Robinson, 2012; Tyack & Tobin, 1994). This review also examines previous research to define the policy environments surrounding public education, policy implementation, and political engagement within the U.S. Next, the unique political environment and culture in a particular southeastern state impacting education policies is discussed. Then, street-level bureaucrat is defined along with a discussion of the role school leaders have in the success, or lack thereof, in policy implementation. This review of the literature discusses

the professional standards that Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and National Policy Board for Educational Administrators (NPBEA) provide for school leaders, the influence Elazar's political culture has on the levels of political engagement in states with traditionalistic political cultures, and theories of political participation. Finally, the conceptual framework grounded in theories of rational choice and political participation used for this study, which shows how a school leader's political engagement helps to effectively influence the political environments which impact public education, is highlighted.

### **Policy Environment**

For the purposes of this study, local, state, and federal policy environments are considered. Mazzoni (1994) defined a policy's environment as the political environment in which the policy is prepared and also the educational environment in which it will be implemented. Local policy environments include policies developed and implemented at the school or district level where policymakers would include school board members, district administrators, and school leaders (Elmore, 1979; Lindle, 2015; Mazzoni, 1994). State policy environments include policies developed at the state level that schools and school districts are mandated to follow. In state policy environments, state level policymakers include elected officials, such as state senators, legislatures, and the governor, along with organizations like this state's Department of Education (Cohen et al., 2007; Elmore, 1979; McDermott, 2003; Mazzoni, 1994). Federal policy

environments include policies such as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) or the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) that are developed at the federal level of government and states and school districts are mandated to follow (Goertz, 2005; Honig, 2006; Mazzoni, 1994).

As policies written at the state and federal level have shifted more toward a focus on accountability by attempting to influence decisions made about curriculum and instruction, the need for engagement from school leaders in these policy environments has increased (Boyd & Crowson, 2002; Brewer, 2011; Carpenter & Brewer, 2014). This increased involvement of state and federal governments in the creation of education policy has led to a more turbulent environment and placed more tension on the relationship between educators and policymakers (Carpenter & Brewer, 2014; Cohen & Moffitt, 2011; Feuerstein, 2002; Verstegen, 2011; Wenner & Settlage, 2015).

There have been unprecedented efforts to reform the quality and content of instruction in America's schools over the past several decades (Boyd & Crowson, 2002; Brewer, 2011; Brewer et al., 2015; O'Laughlin & Lindle, 2015; Spillane et al., 2002). Southworth (2010) and Pitre (2011) argued that the current policy environments have created a culture of distrust among school leaders. School districts were held accountable and required to go through periods of probation because students in those districts did not achieve at expected levels, even if district leaders did not have the necessary resources to provide research proven methods of improving the quality of



instruction (Southworth, 2010; Pitre, 2011).

Accountability and teacher evaluation policies have been viewed as punitive rather than encouraging student success. All schools and teachers are held to the same standard of proficiency without having similar resources to support student achievement (Bracey, 2009, Southworth, 2010). In addition, not all students come to school each day with the same desire to learn as others because of obstacles they face outside of school such as poverty or disabilities (Bracey, 2009; Knoeppel, 2007). Cohen et al. (2007) pointed out that policymakers are not informed enough to understand the resources necessary for student success in different school settings, and the lack of communication between educators and policymakers, creates more levels of distrust (Pitre, 2011).

According to Cohen and Moffitt (2011), federal education policies lead to inefficiencies in the decision making process because of the layers of government that exist at the district, state, and federal levels. Cohen and Moffitt (2011) highlighted these inefficiencies when they stated, "A single decision often must be made, modified, re-made, and re-modified by several branches of government at several levels" (p. 65). Policymakers must understand the vital role played by bureaucrats in not only the policymaking process but the implementation process as well (Cohen, 1982).

Rational policy theory is based on a framework that focuses on the rational behaviors of those involved in the policymaking process (Sabatier, 2007). Zahariadis

(2014) stated rational policy theory “assumes that policymakers attend to problems first and then develop policies to solve them” (p. 75). Under assumptions from rational theory, changes in policy occur through rational interactions between individuals affected by policy and rational decisions made by those creating the policies (Ostrom, 1992; Zahariadis, 2014).

Rational theory implicates school leaders in the policy environments surrounding public education to interact with policymakers and be engaged within the policy environments affecting their professional role (Zahariadis, 2014). These interactions become more essential as school leaders implement local, state, and federal policies at the school level.

### **Policy Implementation**

In the rational approach to policy, policymakers expect others to implement policy with fidelity to achieve the intended outcomes (Marks & Nance, 2007). Thus, federal, state, and local policymakers are expecting educational leaders to interpret and implement policies at the school and classroom levels as intended; however, this does not necessarily happen (Cohen et al., 2007). Spillane et al. (2002) also stated “The meaning of a policy is determined by the interaction of the practitioners’ existing cognitive structure, their situation, and the policy’s signals” (p. 388). When reviewing Spillane’s work, Elmore (2006) noted that the behaviors of those implementing policies often fail to align with what the policymakers intended.

For effective and consistent policy implementation, a productive interaction between school leaders and policymakers that fosters communication and collaboration is necessary (Bryk, 2015; Coburn, 2016; Louis & Robinson, 2012). Cohen et al. (2007) stated that the aim of the policy, the instruments provided by policymakers, the capability of practitioners, and the environment of the policy are four factors impacting the relationship between policymakers and educators. Desimone (2006) considered consistency, specificity, authority, and power as four variables that describe this same relationship. Both Cohen and his colleagues and Desimone addressed the purpose of the policy, the use of the resources, the practitioners' ability to use the resources, and the political environment facing education policies. This comparison of factors further illustrates the importance of stakeholders understanding a policy's intended purpose and knowing how to implement the policy as intended using the resources provided.

When school leaders are politically engaged, there is a higher likelihood that adequate resources will be provided by policymakers and in turn a higher likelihood that they will be used appropriately (Louis & Robinson, 2012; Spillane & Kenney, 2012). Marks and Nance (2007) attributed the inconsistencies in implementation to the fact that "schooling is typically decentralized throughout states and school districts, policy environments contain a multiplicity of actors whose interpretation of state policies and views on implementing them may be in conflict" (p. 4).

Providing sufficient resources is very important, but the effective use of those

resources provided by a policy is much more imperative (Bryk, 2015; Cohen et al., 2007; Knoeppel, 2007; Marks & Nance, 2007; McDermott, 2009). Spillane et al. (2002) noted those tasked with implementing policy must have an appropriate understating of the policy's signals and how resources should be used most efficiently to meet the aims of the policymakers. Cohen et al. (2007) noted, "Different schools and teachers [do] different things with the same resources, with different effects on learning" (p. 517), which illustrates the need for school leaders to understand how policymakers intend for resources to be used during policy implementation (Bryk, 2015; Louis & Robinson, 2012).

Kafka (2009) noted one must recognize that the public places a significant emphasis on the political aspects of education policy and lays responsibility for the success of policies on principals. An important variable impacting the importance of developing coherent education policies are the resources dedicated to public education in states throughout the United States (Verstegen, 2011). To highlight this importance, Verstegen stated "Education is the largest share of state and local government budgets and a continuing concern of lawmakers, the courts, educators and the public" (p. 2). Because of the large amount of resources dedicated to public education, policymakers need educational leaders to be engaged in the policy environments and able to use resources provided by in order to accurately interpret and implement the policies as intended (Neely & Diebold, 2016).

Those that are responsible for the development of education policies and the allocation of resources for public education are not the people ultimately responsible for devising the plans for the most efficient way to implement policies or the utilization of resources (Cohen & Moffitt, 2011; Pitre, 2011; Plank & Boyd, 1994). Without clear articulation of student and teacher needs, adequate resources may not be allocated to fully implement the policies (Cohen et al., 2007). Yet, by being politically engaged and interacting with policymakers, school leaders can better articulate their needs as policymakers provide resources to those responsible for policy implementation (Pitre, 2011).

### **Political Engagement**

Implementers of policy must be politically engaged in order to be knowledgeable enough about the policy to utilize available resources to implement policies in a way that is consistent with the aims and desires of policymakers (Brady et al., 1995). Scholars of political engagement research (Cantijoch et al. 2016; Furlong, 1998; Longo, Drury and Battistoni, 2006; Schneider & Ingram, 1993) identify several behaviors indicative of politically engaged individuals. Hays (2015) stated that political engagement requires that an individual be informed about policy decisions and the political process, and noted that engagement requires specific skills and knowledge. Among those skills and knowledge, Hays listed voting, contacting policymakers, and being engaged with local networks.

Voting in elections is the simplest form of political engagement (Abdelzadeh, Ozdemir, & Van Zalk, 2015; Cantijoch, Cutts, & Gibson, 2016; Furlong, 1998; Sabatier,

1991; Schneider & Ingram, 1993). Voter behavior can have a significant impact on the decisions and behaviors of policymakers when dealing with specific issues if elected officials feel voters can affect their ability to remain in office (Schneider & Ingram, 1993). However, political engagement is much more than simply voting and participating in the electoral process (Cantijoch et al.). Cantijoch et al. also considered voting, donating to a political organization, contacting a government official, and participating in political discussion to constitute political engagement. Being informed and knowledgeable allows individuals to be more comfortable participating in these behaviors (Abdelzadeh et al.; Hays, 2015; Reichert, 2016).

In their discussion about citizens being politically engaged, Abdelzadeh et al. (2015) highlighted the importance of being knowledgeable when they stated, "Citizens should be active in other ways and, at the same time, have an interest in and a good understanding of politics to enable a basic level of participation" (p. 414). Reichert (2016) and Hays (2015) both stated that once individuals are more knowledgeable about specific policies and policy environments they are more likely to develop the confidence and ability to effectively articulate their policy goals.

Among the general citizenry, Reichert (2016) reported that once someone is informed enough to have a basic understanding of policy decisions, and has the confidence to become more engaged politically, he or she is more likely to contact policymakers directly or volunteer to be part of a political committee. Furlong (1998),

writing about agency in bureaucracies, stated that having direct contact with policymakers is the most effective way to impact the direction and aim of a policy. Longo et al. (2006) advised civics teachers that as political participants become more knowledgeable and actively engaged in different political behaviors, they increase their own self efficacy and become more comfortable and willing to contact policymakers to voice their concerns with policies that impact specific issues (Sabatier, 1991).

Voting, contacting policymakers, and making financial contributions to specific policymaker campaigns are behaviors indicative of individuals that are politically engaged (Cantijoch et al. 2011; 2016; Furlong, 1998; Hays, 2015; Reichart, 2016). Individuals become more likely to participate in these behaviors when they are knowledgeable and informed about specific policies (Abdelzadeh et al. 2015; Hays; Reichart) especially when the need arises to voice concerns about specific issues that individuals feel need to be addressed within specific policy environments (Longo et al., 2006; Sabatier, 1991).

### **Public Education in a Selected Southeastern State**

Historically, the state located in the southeastern region of the United States that is the focus of this study has not been supportive of public education. Truitt (2006) called this state's record on public education "dismal" (p. 3). In the 1950s, this state's legislature voted to disband the state's public school system rather than live with desegregation, opening the door for a culture of private schools to flourish (Brewer et

al., 2015; Lindle & Hampshire, 2017; Truitt, 2006; 2009; Werts et al., 2013). This southeastern state has accumulated what Ladson-Billings (2006) defined as educational debt while writing about the context of education policies in other southern states. She argued that the historical, economic, political, and moral components of states can place students in their public schools at a disadvantage (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

In this specific state, political and cultural objections to desegregation led to different definitions of educational adequacy. Prominent political leaders of the 1950s and 1960s such as Strom Thurmond, James F. Byrnes, and Albert Watson argued in favor of segregated schools which led to the creation of vastly different public school systems within the state (Baker, 2006; Brewer et al., 2015; Knoeppel, Brewer, Lindle, & First, 2009; Lindle & Hampshire, 2017). Edgar (1998) noted that as this trend moved throughout specific parts of the state, public officials increased their criticism of public schools.

Students in specific geographic areas of the state continue to lag behind on standardized tests (Hein, 2017; Werts et al., 2013). These areas include districts that have a more diverse student population and more students who live in low-income households (Hein; Myers, 2015; Werts et al., 2013). Several districts labeled as underperforming were involved in a lawsuit against the state for over twenty years because of a lack of support for public education which has “shaped the education landscape throughout the entire state” (Hein, 2017, p. 1).



Because of the negative perception of the state's system of public education, opportunities have arisen for opponents of public education to gain support among the general population of the state and within the state government (Edgar, 1998; Lindle & Hampshire, 2017). Because of this perception, a system has been created where supporting public education is not a priority for many state legislators in the southeastern state because of the historical notion that public education was primarily aimed to serve the lower class (Brewer et al., 2015; Cook, 2004; Fischel, 2006; Lindle & Hampshire). The state's traditionalistic political culture has been dominated by those looking to portray the state's public education system in a negative light (Brewer et al.; Lindle & Hampshire).

Despite trends that show the state's public schools as some of the most improved in the nation, the state continues to rate its public schools using State Report Card data that label the majority of schools negatively. Yet, according to Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA), the state has maintained rigorous student achievement standards. In fact, there are some students who have been labeled below grade level according to their test results based on the state's high-stakes standards may have been considered as meeting grade level achievement according to the standards in nearby states (Dahlin & Cronin, 2009).

According to the NWEA, in 2006, the state had the highest reading standards for eighth grade students and the highest math standards for third grade and eighth

grade students when compared to academic standards from 27 other states (Dahlin & Cronin, 2009). The U.S. Department of Education reported, “the state had the highest eighth grade mathematics standards in the country and the third highest for fourth grade students in 2008” (Bandeira de Mello, Blankenship & McLaughlin, 2009, p.17).

Despite the high performance requirements of this state’s academic standards, Werts et al. (2013) noted "an overwhelming sense of frustration about accountability policy" (p. 406), particularly among the state’s professional educators. In a study of stakeholders’ perceptions about the state’s education policy, Werts et al. stated that "the state accountability system was failing children...the system positioned those who cared about education to fail" (p. 398). Educational leaders and policymakers become frustrated with one another for the failures of education policies within the state (Werts et al.), which contributes to an unwillingness to advocate for or participate in the education policy environment. Rather than find solutions to the continued frustration, "...these discussions of in/adequacy of public schools continue to be rearticulated" (Knoeppel et al., 2009, p. 21).

### **Street-Level Bureaucrat**

Though policymakers attempt to influence change by writing effective policies, they are dependent upon the influence of others to effectively interpret and implement their policies (Hill, 2003; Lipsky, 1977). Policy decisions are made at all levels of government, local, state, and federal (Brewer et al., 2015), that depend upon

relationships with people to help ensure they are implemented consistently and with fidelity (Goertz, 2005; McDermott, 2003; Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993; Yanow, 1996). Street-level bureaucrats can impact the success or failure of policymakers' ideas and political stature by working with practitioners to understand and develop their perceptions of policies (Hill, 2003; Weatherley & Lipsky, 1977).

Effective street-level bureaucrats are politically engaged and knowledgeable about the policies they are attempting to influence. Street-level bureaucrats interact with all stakeholders involved in the implementation of policy to develop consensus between policymakers and those required to execute effectively the resources provided to meet the expectations of policymakers (Bryk, 2015; Hill, 2003). Street-level bureaucrats also advocate on behalf of those using the resources policymakers provide to help ensure that they are given sufficient resources to reach the goals of the policy (Brady et al., 1995; Cohen et al., 2007; Elmore, 1979; Hill, 2003; Sabatier, 1988; Weatherley & Lipsky, 1977).

One of the biggest obstacles facing policymakers is developing a common sense of values with constituents, which is why the creation of consensus and coherence amongst those involved is so valuable (Honig & Hatch, 2004; Mead, 2004). Developing consensus occurs by collaboration and interaction with stakeholders and helps to distinguish appropriate solutions for those implicated by policy (Sabatier, 1991; Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993). Policymakers rely on the effectiveness of street-level

bureaucrats, who have a tremendous influence over the perceptions of policy in any environment, especially in education (Brewer, 2011; Cohen & Moffitt, 2011; Cohen et al., 2007; Lipsky, 1977; Sabatier, 1991).

### **Roles of School Leaders**

Education policy “depends on the ability of schools and districts to enact policies, and this is most effectively done through collaboration among superintendents, building administrators, boards, and community members” (Sherman, 2008, p. 677). All stakeholders involved in the education of a community’s children must be able to effectively interpret the meaning of local, state, and federal policy in order for the policy to be implemented effectively (Brewer, 2011; Sherman). School leaders are expected to accurately interpret and implement policies created at the local, state, and federal level effectively by being engaged with policy and serving as street-level bureaucrats (Ball, 1998; Hill, 2003; Honig & Hatch, 2004; Spillane et al., 2002). Brewer stated school leaders need to be prepared to “address the complexity of this multi-dimensional role” (p. 457).

Policy is often not implemented with the fidelity necessary to meet the desired goals of policymakers due to the inefficient and frustrating relationship between these groups (Pitre, 2011; Sabatier, 1988). Spillane et al. (2002) stated, “If implementing agents construct ideas that misconstrue policymakers' intent, then implementation failure is likely. Implementation failure in this case results not because implementing agents

reject the reform ideas advanced via standards-based reform but because they understand them differently” (p. 419). Implementing agents are those people tasked the with responsibility of interpreting and implementing the policies (Spillane et al., 2002).

The relationship between policymakers and educational leaders is hindering the efficient implementation of policy (Lindle & Hampshire, 2017). Educational agencies and policymakers must collaborate with one another to create effective education policies which will lead to student success (Pitre, 2011). Policymakers take for granted the role of those implementing the policy (Cohen et al., 2007), thus policies are often not implemented as policymakers intend (Louis & Robinson, 2012).

Brewer (2011) stated, "Educational leaders must be prepared to act as political strategists that bring all stakeholders together to act in the best interests of students" (p. 460). Goodman, Baron, and Myers (2005) noted, “One aspect of altering educational reform concerns altering the political relationships and dynamics of power within a school or school district” (p. 298). By being politically engaged within the local policy environment, school leaders are more likely to alter these political relationships in order to act as a political strategist (Brewer; Goodman et al.). Oftentimes, policymakers and school leaders view the needs that must be addressed by policies as not aligning with the perspectives of one another, which can lead to a perceived misuse of resources (Cohen et al. 2007; Louis & Robinson, 2012; Spillane et al. 2002).

While policymakers may provide states with a clear set of standards and descriptions of how these standards are to be assessed, all too often, educators are not provided with the necessary infrastructure to help meet the needs of all students (Cohen & Moffitt, 2011; Goertz, 2005; Louis & Robinson, 2012; Spillane & Kenney, 2012). As a result of being engaged in the policymaking process, school leaders can articulate the needs and goals more clearly to policymakers (Spillane et al., 2002). This can potentially lead to more efficient and consistent implementation of policies by those implementing them (Carpenter & Brewer, 2014; Honig & Hatch, 2004; Louis & Robinson; Spillane et al., 2002; Yanow, 1996).

### **Political Engagement for School Leaders**

Since the 1970s, school leaders, such as principals and assistant principals, have been called upon to be more engaged politically and more knowledgeable about policy decisions made at the local, state, and federal levels of policymaking impacting public education (Brewer, 2011; Carpenter & Brewer, 2014; Koyama, 2014; O’Laughlin & Lindle; 2015). When groups of people with similar desires and goals band together and voice both their political desires and concerns about policy, policymakers' behavior will often reflect this voice (Sabatier, 1991).

Due to the fact that school leaders remain frustrated about policy that impacts decisions made at the school level, it is possible that they may not be engaged with

policy at specific levels of government that impact education (Brewer, 2011; Cohen & Moffitt, 2011; Cohen et al., 2007; Feuerstein, 2002; Honig & Hatch, 2004; Louis & Robinson, 2012; Plank & Boyd, 1994; Spillane & Kenney, 2012). Therefore, it is necessary to analyze school leaders' policy knowledge and other behaviors that indicate political engagement.

### **School Leaders as Street-Level Bureaucrats**

The complex role of the school leader can be viewed as a street-level bureaucrat, because principals and assistant principals fulfill the role of both a policymaker and implementer (Cohen et al., 2007; Honig, 2006; Koyama, 2014; Spillane & Kenney, 2012). They are responsible for both policy implementation and interpreting policy to faculty, students, and parents (Kafka, 2009; Lipsky, 1977). Lipsky (1969) defined street-level bureaucrats as "those men and women who, in their face-to-face encounters with citizens, represent government to the people" (p. 1).

Policymakers at all levels of educational governance depend on school leaders to be engaged in the policy environment in order to make what happens in schools match the intent of what happens in state capitals. Sabatier (1988) stated, "What happens in Washington or Sacramento is little more than words on paper until it affects the behavior of street-level bureaucrats and, ultimately, target groups" (p. 151), which is why policymakers depend upon school leaders to be engaged with the policies written to impact public education.

The role of the school leader in the process of policy development is quite complex, but when analyzed through the lens of policymaker and bureaucrat, it becomes clear how important a school level administrator's role is in the local implementation and perception of policy. When discussing political bureaucrats, Putnam (1973) explained the need for them to embrace compromise which oftentimes requires bargaining and working together with those who have differing views on policy to obtain their desired goals. However, Nelson (1982) added "programs are established by law with certain purposes in mind; their actual effects, however, are not (or are not only) those that were intended" (p. 774). As street-level bureaucrats, school leaders play a vital role in the creation and implementation of education policies in similar ways as Putnam and Nelson described political bureaucrats (Lipsky, 1977; Sherman, 2008).

School leaders are often stuck between several different reform efforts stemming from initiatives at the local, state, and even federal levels (Louis & Robinson, 2012). Hess (1999) indicated that when multiple reform efforts are in place, school leaders, acting in the role of implementing agents, often become frustrated and the credibility policymakers seek to have with educators is damaged. Louis and Robinson (2012) stated, "The degree of consistency perceived by implementing agents of accountability policies between the policy content and their own values, goals and strategies for achieving them..." (p. 632) has a significant impact on the attitudes of these agents toward implementing these policies with fidelity and consistency.



According to rational policy theory, local, state, and federal policymakers depend upon administrators to implement policies and manage resources as they intend (Brady et al., 1995). From this perspective, school leaders to be more engaged and active participants in the policy environments is essential. As policies trickle down into the classroom, principals assume the role of policymaker for teachers, counselors, and other personnel within a school system (Cohen et al., 2007). Oftentimes, this leads to a reliance upon street-level bureaucrats which can affect the levels of consistency with policy implementation (Cohen et al., 2007; Koyama, 2014; McDermott, 2003; O’Laughlin & Lindle, 2015). When school leaders are not engaged with the policy environments that impact their professional roles, inconsistency with policy implementation tends to occur more often (Fuhrman et al., 2007; Louis & Robinson, 2012; Spillane, 2008; Spillane & Kenney, 2012; Tyack & Tobin, 1994).

There is a significant level of uncertainty around the principalship because of the complicated role of implementing policy as both a policymaker and policy implementer (Honig & Hatch, 2004). As Kafka (2009) stated, "Principals are neither at the top of the educational hierarchy nor at the ground level, but are somewhere in the middle" (p. 329). Because school leaders must interpret policy and then collaborate with teachers and other groups of people to effectively implement policies as intended by policymakers, they "work at framing policy so as to appeal to teachers' interests,

values, goals, and norms" (Spillane & Kenney, 2012, p. 552). Schools and school systems are political organizations in which power is an organizing feature (Lindle & Mawhinney, 2003). Thus, there is a need for political leadership and for the accurate articulation and interpretation of policy to various stakeholder groups including teachers, students, and other community members.

School leaders, at times, are also faced with the dilemma of enforcing and implementing policies that they do not agree with (Brewer, 2011). Policymakers depend on educational administrators to implement the policies with fidelity, but when these policies do not align with the beliefs, values, and desires of educators, this leads to more discontent and lower morale for educators (Louis & Robinson, 2012; O'Day, 2002; Spillane & Kelley, 2012). When this occurs, an additional strain is placed on school leaders and the interpersonal relationships between them and those directly affected by the policies they are forced to implement whether they agree or disagree with the intent of the policies (Cohen et al., 2007). Because of this unique role as a street-level bureaucrat (Kafka, 2009), school leaders will be more effective implementers of policy if they are politically engaged so that they are informed enough to implement policies appropriately.

### **Professional Standards for School Leadership**

While Knapp et al. (2003) and Kafka (2009) contended that the principalship has maintained a relatively consistent job description, Browne-Ferrigno and Fusarelli (2005)

argued that the demands from recent accountability policy have changed the role of the administrator. They stated:

An effective principal, by today's standards, is one who can address a daily stream of diverse administrative issues needing immediate attention...To meet continuous changes in society, the economy, and educational policy, current principals must be skilled in facilitation, influence, and vision-building (p. 128).

Browne-Ferrigno and Fusarelli highlight the imperative need for school leaders to be politically engaged with the policy environments surrounding their professional role.

The 1996 and 2008 versions of the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards, along with the 2011 Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC) Standards, supported the various roles of the principal mentioned by Kafka, Knapp et. al, and Brown-Ferrigno and Johnson-Fusarelli (CCSSO, 1996; CCSSO, 2008, CCSSO, 2011). Kafka (2009) noted that, while the job description of a principal has been relatively consistent for the last several decades, the newest expectation for school leaders involves the changing political environment that surrounds public education. Kafka (2009) stated "Principals should be strategic, instructional, organizational, political, and community leaders..." (p. 328). Kafka illustrates the need for school leaders to be politically engaged along with the other responsibilities they have in their professional role.

In 1996, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) developed the ISLLC Standards in an attempt to provide a framework for the expectations and behaviors of principals (Murphy, 2005). These original standards for school leadership began a dialogue about the role of the school leader as more of a leader than simply a manager of resources, however, they also emphasized the importance of school leaders as participants in the process of policy development.

These standards were updated in 2008 and again in 2011 (CCSSO, 2008; CCSSO, 2011). The six standards can be seen in Table 2.1 along with a comparison to the newer standards from 2015. Standard Six also contained indicators encouraging school leaders to advocate for students, teachers and their communities and to act to influence policies at the local, state, and federal level (CCSSO, 2011, p. 15).

The six standards were replaced with the newer standards that can be seen in Table 2.1, which compares the 2011 ELLC standards to the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL). Despite ample evidence that administrators work within schools and school districts that are deeply political organizations (Lindle & Mawhinney, 2003), the PSEL were updated in 2015 and no longer include a standard that explicitly addresses the need for political leadership by school leaders (NPBEA, 2015), however the ELLC standards are still used to guide administrative preparation programs at many universities.

Policies are written at the local, state, and federal levels that impact virtually

each one of these standards (Carpenter & Brewer, 2014; Lindle, 2015). However, the standard no longer in place to address the need for administrators to be political leaders or advocates for the teachers and students in their schools, despite the importance of engaging with policymakers in order to effectively implement policies created at all levels of government (Lindle, 2015).

Table 2.1

Comparison of Leadership Standards for School Leaders

	ELCC Standards for Educational Leadership (CCSSO, 2011)	Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (NPBEA, 2015)
1.	A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community.	Effective educational leaders develop, advocate, and enact a shared mission, vision, and core values of high-quality education and academic success and well-being of <i>each</i> student.
2.	A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.	Effective educational leaders act ethically and according to professional norms to promote <i>each</i> student's academic success and well-being.
3.	A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.	Effective educational leaders strive for equity of educational opportunity and culturally responsive practices to promote <i>each</i> student's academic success and well-being.
4.	A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by	Effective educational leaders develop and support intellectually rigorous and coherent systems of curriculum,

	collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.	instruction, and assessment to promote <i>each</i> student's academic success and well-being.
5.	A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.	Effective educational leaders cultivate an inclusive, caring, and supportive school community that promotes the academic success and well-being of <i>each</i> student.
6.	A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context (CCSSO, 2011).	Effective educational leaders develop the professional capacity and practice of school personnel to promote <i>each</i> student's academic success and well-being.
7.		Effective educational leaders foster a professional community of teachers and other professional staff to promote <i>each</i> student's academic success and well-being.
8.		Effective educational leaders engage families and the community in meaningful, reciprocal, and mutually beneficial ways to promote <i>each</i> student's academic success and well-being.
9.		Effective educational leaders manage school operations and resources to promote <i>each</i> student's academic success and well-being.
10.		Effective educational leaders act as agents of continuous improvement to promote <i>each</i> student's academic success and well-being. (NPBEA, 2015)

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Schools, and the roles of the school level administrators, in particular, have been

deeply affected by the increased political attention given to public education over the last several decades (Boyd & Crowson, 2002). These new standards address very important aspects of the principalship, but do not provide guidelines to address the increased political responsibilities that come with the various policy environments in which school leaders work (Browne- Ferrigno & Fusarelli, 2005; Kafka, 2009; Knapp et al., 2003; Spillane, Parise, & Sherer, 2011). Honig and Hatch (2004) noted "Education policy researchers often frame eliminating policy incoherence as a preferred outcome" (p. 16), because being able to accurately interpret and understand policy is a more important part of the principalship than ever before, and, thus, impacts educational leaders' abilities to impact instruction and student achievement.

### **The Influence of Political Culture**

The unique political culture in this southeastern state helps explain the political climate and lack of political engagement from certain portions of the state's population. Political culture can be defined as the enduring political attitudes and behaviors associated with groups that live in a defined geographical context (Elazar, 1980). These attitudes and behaviors can be categorized into three dominant political cultures: traditionalistic, moralistic, and individualistic (Elazar, 1980; 1984). Political culture is a crucial variable that shapes how the powerful view their own interests and how others respond to leaders and their decisions (Kofod, et al., 2012). Elazar (1984) suggested three aspects of political culture were vital in determining a location's specific political

culture:

1. The set of perceptions of what politics is and what can be expected from government, held by both the general public and the politicians
2. The kinds of people who become active in government and politics, as holders of elective offices, members of the bureaucracy, and active political workers
3. The actual way in which the art of government is practiced by citizens, politicians, and public officials in the light of their perceptions (p. 112)

Fitzpatrick and Hero (1988) noted, "Research concerning political culture has been relatively successful in confirming hypothesized relationships between political cultures and individual political attitudes and behavior" (p. 145), for example, educational leaders and their engagement in the different policy environments that impact their professional roles. Recent studies have shown Elazar's Three Political Cultures to continue to be relevant for studying political activity in a variety of fields (Chamberlain, 2013; Dincer & Johnston, 2014; Febey & Louis, 2008; Gordon & Louis, 2012; Kuhlman, 2007; Louis, 2012; McLendon & Cohen-Vogel, 2008; Mead, 2004; Mondak & Canache, 2014).

The three political cultures Elazar (1984) defined are found in the fifty U.S. states. In traditionalistic cultures, "policy is made by elites with an emphasis on continuity and control" (p. 118). In individualistic cultures, "the political arena is a



marketplace and policy is determined by public demands” (p. 115). In moralistic cultures, “the emphasis is on what is best for the public good, and the common citizen is viewed as the primary actor” (p. 117).

Political cultures vary by state and have a strong effect on the development of educational policies, and "the prevailing perspective appears to support the notion that these three types shed light on the enormous variability in educational policies that can be confusing to outside observers" (Louis, 2012, p. 118). Gordon and Louis (2012) summarized this thought by stating "when it comes to education policy, the United States might be better thought of as 50 countries tied together with packing tape" (p. 171).

States' education policies differ greatly when examining their approaches to reform, especially to developing and implementing standards and assessments, and can be explained by Elazar's political culture types. For example, of the 18 states that were ranked as having the highest stakes standardized testing policies, the majority, like this state, are classified as having a traditionalistic political culture (Febey & Louis, 2008).

The traditionalistic political culture accepts government as an actor with a positive role in the community, but it tries to limit that role to securing the continued maintenance of the existing social order (Elazar, 1980, p. 276). Political participation and engagement is often limited to a small group of decision makers without much interaction between policymakers and the general public or input from various

stakeholder groups (Devos et al., 2012; Dincer & Johnston, 2014). Gordon and Louis (2012) added that in traditionalistic states, policymaking is generally a top-down phenomenon with outside input only coming from appointed stakeholders. Voter turnout and political participation have continued to be lower in states Elazar defined as traditionalistic compared to moralistic or individualistic (Chamberlain, 2013; Dincer & Johnston, 2014; Elazar, 1984; Wirt, Mitchell, & Marshall, 1985).

The focus in this study is on the traditionalistic political culture because that is the political culture found in the state where the study occurred. This southeastern state was one of four states that identified as having a predominantly traditionalistic political culture without one of the other political cultures as a secondary subculture (Elazar, 1984; Mead, 2004) resulting in a significant impact on policies impacting public education (Febey & Louis, 2012; Louis, 2012).

The political culture of this state leads to generalizations that can be made about why different stakeholder groups fail to be actively engaged in political environments that impact their careers. Wirt et al. (1985) noted that in traditionalistic political cultures "attitudes about participation, trust in government, and governmental intervention are lower" (p. 50). This likely results in lower levels of political engagement from segments of the population that have traditionally viewed policy as marginalizing their best interests such as low income families or minority populations (Brewer et al., 2015; Elazar, 1984; Werts et al., 2013).

Educational leaders in this southeastern state must find ways to become engaged in the policy environments that impact public education without allowing the political elites to dictate policies that have little impact on what occurs in the classrooms. Febey and Louis (2008) stated, "As states attempt to enact policies and mechanisms to affect education, political culture will play a role in determining how they balance conflicting expectations and policies" (p. 55). In this state, there is a sense of low academic expectations for certain communities, and a perception that policymakers are content with certain school districts lagging behind others. Kuhlman (2007) stated "It is easy to envision how general mistrust can stymie political participation" (p. 6).

### **Theories of Political Participation**

Italian political scientist Alessandro Pizzorno (1970) argued that political participation is often correlated with a person's perceived authority within a given community and that those individuals that are already advantaged within a given political climate are more likely to maintain their levels of political engagement with policymakers. Brady, Verba and Schlozman (1995) and Cantijoch et al. (2011) supported Pizzorno's theory of participation with their model that indicates variables such as income, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, level of education, and political efficacy can predict levels of political engagement. A person's own self-interest in a particular policy or political issue can also be a driving force for their level of political engagement (Fowler & Kam, 2007).

For a person to be politically engaged, oftentimes, they have to feel invited to participate in the political process (Brady et al., 1995; Dalton, 2014; Fowler & Kam, 2007; Vigoda, 2002). Dalton (2014) stated access to resources also can impact a person's ability and willingness to participate in the political process. This access, or lack thereof, could lead to variables such as socioeconomic status and location impacting a person's levels of political engagement. Age and experience can also be significant predictors of political engagement (Sloam, 2014). In the southeastern state where this study takes place, student achievement is often perceived to be impacted by a lack of resources in specific areas of the state where historically students have not achieved academic success as well as students in other areas of the state (Brewer et al, 2015; Werts et al., 2013).

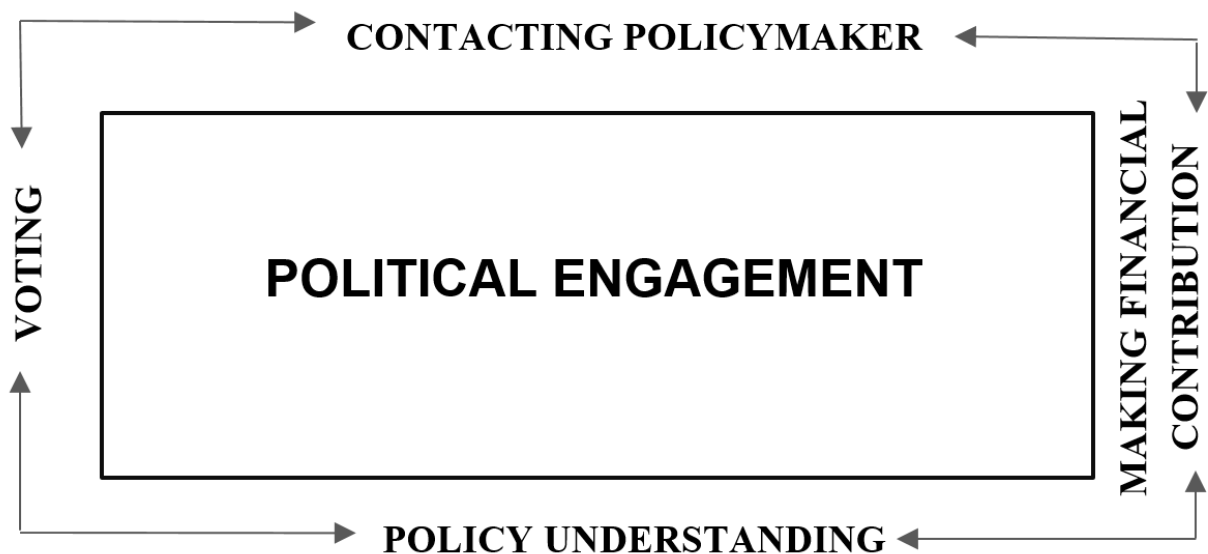
Due to the unique traditionalistic political culture in the state where the study took place, along with the variables that scholars indicate predict one's level of political engagement, it is important to gain a better understanding of school leaders' political engagement with the policy environments surrounding public education. When a group of people feel marginalized within the political structure, they will find themselves disengaged (Brady et al., 1995; Fowler & Kam, 2007; Pizzorno, 1970). When school leaders find themselves disengaged and uninvolved, it can lead to a lack of political engagement and policies that are ineffective due to a variety of factors and lack of collaboration.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Political engagement is not a linear process. As highlighted in Figure 2.1, the behaviors that occur when an individual is politically engaged are shown to be interrelated and mutually reinforcing. Policy understanding impacts a person's

willingness to participate in other behaviors such as voting, contacting policymakers, and contributing to a campaign (Hays, 2015; Reichart, 2016). Often contacting a policymaker makes someone more knowledgeable and can have an impact on how a person votes or his or her willingness to financially contribute to a policymaker (Cantijoch et al., 2016).

**Figure 2.1** Political Engagement Framework

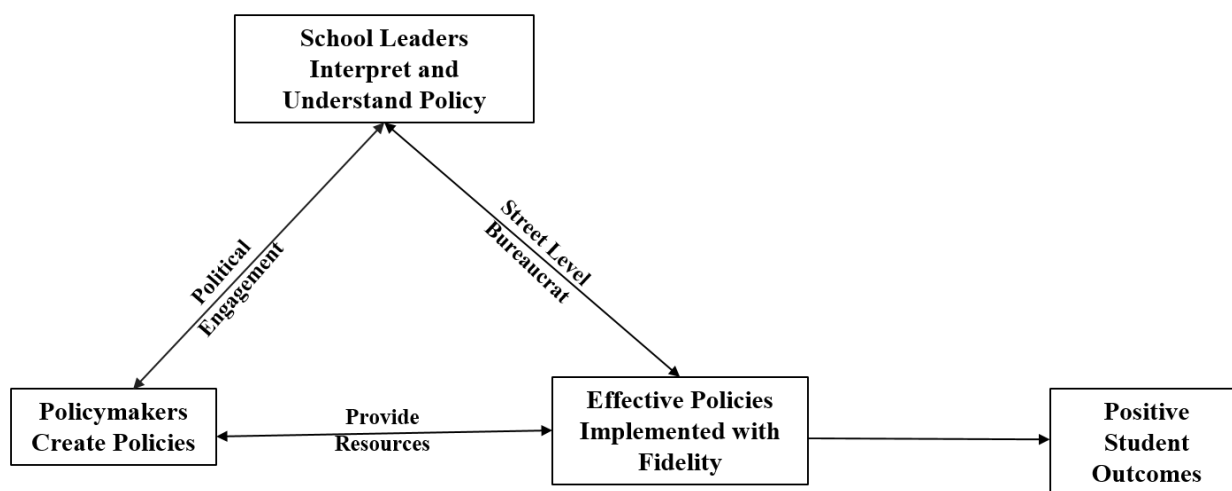


School leaders find themselves in a unique role as both a policymaker and policy implementer in regards to education policy (Kafka, 2009). It is also imperative to note that the traditionalistic political culture in the southeastern state where the study is being conducted is indicative of a less engaged population that relies upon an elite group to create policies and make policy decisions that may not always benefit the state as a whole (Elazar, 1984). Despite the need for school leaders to be actively engaged with policy that impacts public education, the traditionalistic political

culture could contribute to a lack of engagement where engagement is needed most (Kafka, 2009; Spillane & Kenney, 2012). Such a situation could also lead to inefficient policy implementation or a lack of resources to implement the policies effectively.

The role of school leaders as street-level bureaucrats that are required to implement policies created by policymakers in several different policy environments is highlighted in Figure 2.2. The conceptual framework shows the importance of school leaders being politically engaged and collaborating with policymakers (Brewer, 2011; Carpenter & Brewer, 2014; Cohen et al., 2007; Kafka, 2009; Spillane et al., 2002; Spillane & Kenney, 2012) combined with research about theories of political participation (Dalton, 2014; Pizzorno, 1970; Vigoda, 2002) and rational choice (Brady et al., 1995; Kingdon, 2003; Ostrom, 1992; Zahariadis, 2014). By being politically engaged with the policy environments surrounding their professional roles, school leaders can potentially be more informed about policymakers' desires and goals for policies. They can also advocate for appropriate resources in order to implement policies with fidelity. This situation leads to a more efficient political environment that allows for educators to be provided with appropriate resources in order to lead to positive student outcomes.

**Figure 2.2.** Conceptual Framework



Policymakers and educational leaders, especially school-level leaders, depend on one another in order to effectively and consistently implement policy (Cohen et al., 2007). This framework illustrates the importance of productive interaction between policymakers and school leaders, because there is a reliance on one another and a need for effective negotiation between both parties in order to create effective education policy (Brewer, 2011; Brewer & Carpenter, 2014; Coburn, 2016; Kafka 2009; Spillane & Kenney, 2012).

### **Conclusion**

School leaders are called to lead in many capacities, and political leadership should be considered with the same level of importance as instructional leadership and managing resources. Educational leaders are required to implement policies written by local, state, and federal policymakers that impact curriculum, instructional practices,

resources, and other professional responsibilities (Boyd & Crowson, 2002; Brewer et al., 2015; Honig & Hatch, 2004; Kafka, 2009; Lindle & Hampshire, 2017; Spillane & Kenney, 2012). However, the relationship between educators and policymakers is damaged, especially in this state. Because of the lack of communication and the level of frustration between school leaders and policymakers, there is not an adequate level of understanding about necessary resources needed for proper policy implementation (Cohen et al., 2007, Mosher et al., 2007).

According to the rational choice approach to policy development and implementation (Ball, 1998; Bryk, 2015; Ostrom, 1992; Zahariadis, 2014) policies are more effective when all stakeholders understand each other's perspective and role in the policy development and implementation process (Cohen et al., 2007; Desimone, 2006; Marks & Nance, 2007; Putnam, 1973; Sherman, 2008; Spillane et al., 2002; Vigoda, 2002). However, school leaders should look for avenues to become active participants to enable the creation of policies that can be implemented more consistently despite the traditionalistic political culture and the unique historical perspective of the state where the study takes place. Yet, neither the level of school leaders' engagement nor how the level of engagement varies across the state by demographic variables is currently known.



## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

School leaders are asked to interpret and implement policies written at all levels of government, yet there are inconsistencies with policy implementation, which leads to frustration between policymakers and educational leaders (Brewer, 2011). School leaders' perceived levels of engagement may provide insight about how a southeastern U.S. state's traditional political culture (Elazar, 1984; Mead, 2004) may influence their participation in behaviors indicative of a politically engaged individual. Demographic variables will also be collected to determine if they predict a school leader's political engagement as theories of political participation would predict (Cantijoch et al., 2016; Whitely & Seyd, 2002).

#### **Research Questions**

Because the level of political engagement for school leaders in this southeastern state was not known, the following research questions were addressed in this study:

- What is the extent to which school leaders in a selected southeastern U.S. state perceive their levels of political engagement with the policy environments surrounding their professional roles?
- What demographic variables predict school leaders' perceptions about their levels of political engagement with the policy environments surrounding their professional roles in a state located in the southeastern United States?

## **Research Design**

For this quantitative research study, a non-experimental, descriptive, cross-sectional snapshot research design was used to measure school leaders' perceived levels of engagement with local, state, and federal education policies. Survey data was collected to provide information about school leaders' policy knowledge and policy-related interactions with policymakers, which has been the aim of previous non-experimental, descriptive research studies (e.g. Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2006). Gall et al. stated that studies with descriptive designs have "helped shape educational policy and initiatives to improve existing conditions" (p. 301).

Survey research is an effective method for providing insight into trends and opinions of a sample of people (Creswell, 2009). School leaders were asked about their specific behaviors that are indicative of political engagement (Cantijoch et al., 2016; Furlong, 1998; Hays, 2015; Schneider & Ingram, 2003). They were also asked to provide their perceptions about their support for policies created at the different policy levels that impact their professional roles as school level administrators along with responses to questions about demographic variables that may predict their levels of political engagement.

School leaders in this state were asked to complete a survey that addressed policy knowledge and behaviors that are indicative of political engagement. Using responses from a survey that was distributed to school leaders throughout the state,

data about administrators' engagement and attitudes towards education policy was quantified and analyzed to determine if principals and assistant principals are engaged with education policy at the local, state, and federal levels. Survey items asked school leaders about policy knowledge and also specific behaviors such as voting or contacting policymakers.

Because of the unique traditionalistic political culture and historical context of the state where this study was conducted, there are specific segments of the population that have lacked the resources necessary to realize academic success (Truitt, 2008; Werts et al., 2013).

### **Research Question One**

School leaders from a state located in the southeastern United States with a traditionalistic political culture (Elazar, 1984) were asked to self-report their likelihood to participate in specific behaviors indicative of a politically engaged individual (Cantijoch et al., 2016; Furlong, 1998; Hays, 2015; Schneider & Ingram, 2003). To answer this question, data collected about the behaviors of school leaders were analyzed using SPSS to determine descriptive statistics about each behavior. Research question one sought perceptions from school leaders about the extent of their engagement within the policy environments created to impact public education. The first research question is as follows:

- What is the extent to which school leaders in a selected southeastern U.S. state perceive their levels of political engagement with the policy environments surrounding their professional roles?

### **Research Question Two**

Demographic data about the individual school leaders was collected such as gender, ethnicity, professional role, location, and years of experience as these variables may have an effect on a school leader's levels of political engagement according to previous research on political participation (Dalton, 2014; Fowler & Kam, 2007; Sloam, 2014; Vigoda, 2002). The complete survey can be found in Appendix D. The second research question is:

What demographic variables predict school leaders' perceptions about their levels of political engagement with the policy environments surrounding their professional roles in a state located in the southeastern United States?

An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted to identify specific factors from the survey items that comprised political engagement. Following the EFA, multiple linear regression models were used to determine which demographic variables predicted the levels of political engagement within the different policy environments impacting public education (Hinkle et al., 2003). Demographic variables served as independent variables and the factors identified through EFA provided dependent variables for the regression models. In order to use a regression model, assumptions of normality, linearity, homogeneity of variances, and independence of errors were tested.

Using SPSS, tests for each of these assumptions were conducted, and then, the regression models were used to determine if any of the variables were predictors of political engagement.

### **Population of Interest**

The population for the study was school level administrators in a state located in the southeastern United States during the 2017-2018 school year. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, there were 1,239 public schools in the state in 2013. According to the Southeastern State's Department of Education website, there were approximately 2500 school leaders in the state. School leaders at all levels of public education, including primary, elementary, middle, and high schools, were contacted via email and asked to complete the survey instrument to gauge their level of participation in the policymaking process and their perceptions about education policy at the federal, state and local levels. Email addresses for principals were obtained from the state department of education's website, while email addresses for other school leaders were found on individual district and school websites.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

After approval from Clemson University's Internal Review Board (IRB) in January 2018, public school leaders in the state, principals and assistant principals, received an email with a link to the online survey in Qualtrics on February 1, 2018 (see Appendix B). A follow up email was sent two weeks later asking administrators to

complete the survey if they had not already done so (see Appendix C). Dodson (2015) stated one can expect to receive approximately 10-15% of surveys to be responded to when distributed electronically, therefore, the goal was to receive between 250 and 375 completed surveys once the survey was distributed to every school leader throughout the state. In order to have a 95% confidence interval with 5% error, 334 responses were needed. The 358 completed responses exceeded the required sample size of 334, resulting in an appropriate confidence interval.

### **Data Collection Instrument**

The survey instrument used for this study can be found in Appendix A. According to Gall et al. (2006), creating a new survey instrument when completing a non-experimental descriptive study is fairly common, because of the limited number of high quality instruments available to research various topics of interest. However, the survey created for this study contains items similar to items from surveys previously used by the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) (Doud & Keller, 1998; Kowalski et al., 2011) and other surveys that have asked questions about educators' attitudes towards policy, along with items written specifically for this research study (Willman, 2015).

The current study expanded a similar study with teachers conducted in another state (William, 2015). Willman surveyed educators about their communication with

policymakers and knowledge of education policy. The majority of the people who responded to Willman's study described themselves as teachers as opposed to school leaders (Willman). In this study, school leaders were asked if they vote regularly, if they contact local, state, or federal government officials, and other behaviors indicative of an individual that is politically engaged which is similar Willman's study but addresses a different population.

Likert scale questions about the level of satisfaction and involvement of school leaders in policy decisions were also included in the survey. School leaders were asked to respond on a Likert scale from 1-5 with statements such as: "I am satisfied with the availability of my local representative in the State Legislature"; "My input is valued and respected by policymakers at the local level in my community"; "My input is valued and respected by policymakers at the state level in my state"; "Overall, I feel the state government responds to the needs of my students." These questions can be found as part of the survey in Appendix D.

In addition, school leaders were asked questions similar to those used during a study in Kentucky (Dodson, 2015). Dodson (2015) questioned principals in Kentucky about the recently-adopted teacher evaluation policy. In Dodson's (2015) study, the survey instrument was focused on a specific education policy in Kentucky. However, questions used in this study are not about one specific policy as Dodson's Kentucky survey was. In Dodson's study, principals reported feeling over worked and

unprepared to effectively implement the policy with fidelity, despite the fact that the majority of those who responded to the survey agreed with the intent and purpose of the policy (Dodson, 2015).

Embedded within the survey instrument were also questions about demographic information and geographic location. This data was reviewed to see if there was a correlation between location or other school leaders' characteristics that might predict their levels of political engagement.

### **Variables**

This study examined school leaders' perceptions of their political engagement and a limited set of demographic variables possibly associated with their likelihood of being politically engaged. Participants were asked about their policy knowledge as well as their political behaviors, because policy knowledge has been shown to be a predictor of political engagement (Reichert, 2016; Longo et al., 2006; Sabatier, 1991).

To answer the second research question, participants were asked to provide demographic information about themselves and the schools where they were employed. These demographic variables became independent variables in multiple regression models to determine any association with these respondents' political engagement. Demographic variables such as a school leader's professional role (PROF\_ROLE), gender (GENDER), ethnicity (ETHNICITY), location (REGION),



years of experience as an administrator (EXP\_ADMIN), years of experience in education (EXP\_EDUCATOR), and the percentage of students receiving free and reduce lunch (FR\_LUNCH) at the school where the school leader is employed were collected to see which, if any, predicted a greater likelihood of political engagement from school leaders. School leaders reported answers to each of the questions as part of the survey they completed.

### **Data Analysis**

After the participants submitted their responses electronically using Qualtrics, the data was imported into SPSS from Qualtrics for analysis. The data was exported in an Excel file and stored on the researcher's password protected computer. The responses are being saved for three years according to IRB policy.

Once all data was collected, SPSS version 23 was used to analyze the responses. Descriptive statistics were calculated such as the mean and standard deviation for the Likert Scale items on the survey instrument. Frequency counts were also calculated for Likert Scale questions and yes or no questions to determine the mode. An exploratory factor analysis was conducted to identify factors that comprise political engagement. Once those factors were identified, linear regression was used to determine if any demographic variables predicted a school leader's level of political engagement.

### **Threats to Validity**

Because of the frustration surrounding education policy (Brewer, 2011; Brewer & Carpenter, 2014; Cohen et al., 2007; Cohen & Moffitt, 2011; Kafka, 2009; Spillane & Kenney, 2012), and the continued debate around how involved educators should be involved in the process, there may be a perception that I expect participants to be frustrated by the policy process. Because of this, school leaders may respond accordingly, and I need to completely separate my current role as a high school administrator when inviting other administrators to participate in my study so that I can eliminate this potential threat to validity (Shadish et al., 2002).

Construct validity, is also a potential limitation. However, by using questions adapted from survey instruments previously used in 2000 and 2010 by the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) which has become The School Superintendents Association, I hope to eliminate any potential construct validity problems. Questions must be worded effectively on the survey instrument in order to avoid any situations where respondents are led to a specific answer. Threats to validity were minimized as much as possible through the effective creation of the survey instrument to limit bias from respondents. The exploratory factors analysis also showed very little correlation between the factors identified as part of the analysis.

## **Summary**

The goals of this non-experimental, quantitative research design were to gain

a better understanding of school leaders' perceptions about their engagement in the education policy environment, and to determine whether selected demographic variables were predictors of their perceived levels of engagement. Creswell (2009) stated survey data can be used to quantify attitudes and perceptions of a population. By surveying school level leaders in this southeastern state, the study was able to determine how school leaders perceive their levels of political engagement with the policy environments that affect their professional roles. On a grander scale, the implications from this study could lead to further research.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to review the findings from the study conducted on the levels of school leaders' political engagement in a state located in the southeastern United States that has a traditionalistic political culture. As implementers of policies written at the local, state, and federal levels of government, school leaders must be engaged with the policies they are expected to implement (Brewer, 2011; Cohen et al., 2007; Desimone, 2006; Frick & Faircloth, 2007). As previously stated in chapters one and two, research has indicated that friction exists between school leaders and policymakers in the southeastern state where this study took place. The friction between these groups of people is possibly a result of a lack of political engagement from school leaders due to a variety of variables.

This study aims to answer the following research questions using a quantitative one point in time research study:

- What is the extent to which school leaders in a selected southeastern U.S. state perceive their levels of political engagement with the policy environments surrounding their professional roles?
- What demographic variables predict school leaders' perceptions about their levels of political engagement with the policy environments surrounding their professional roles in a state located in the southeastern United States?

In order to answer these questions, school leaders responded to a 20-question survey which included a set of demographic variables as well as questions about specific behaviors indicative of political engagement.

### Profile of Participants

School leaders throughout the southeastern state where the study occurred received an email with a link to the online survey, and 358 of the approximately 2550 school level administrators completed the survey. This analysis includes all 358 individual's responses. Participants responded to questions about their professional roles in order to determine whether any correlation between a school leader's professional role and his or her level of political engagement existed. As shown in Table 4.1, participants identified themselves in primarily two categories of school leadership roles.

Table 4.1

#### *Professional Role*

Principal	Assistant Principal	Other
159	190	9

One hundred and fifty-nine (44.4%) of the school leaders that indicated they were principals and 190 (53.1%) reported their role as assistant principal. The nine participants that selected the option of *Other* listed their roles as instructional coach, career and technology education (CATE) director, administrative assistant, or assistant director. In the modeling analyses which were conducted to answer both research questions, the nine participants who selected the *Other* option for their roles were added into the assistant principals group.

As shown in Table 4.2, participants identified themselves by gender by selecting

*Male or Female.* One hundred and sixty-eight participants identified themselves as male and 190 identified themselves as female. As can be seen in Table 4.2, approximately half of the principals are female, and 111 (55.7%) of the assistant principals were female.

Table 4.2

*Professional Role and Gender*

Principal		Assistant Principal	
159		199	
Male	Female	Male	Female
80	79	88	111

School leaders identified their ethnicity from among the following eight forced-choice options: (a) American Indian or Alaska Native, (b) Asian, (c) Black or African American, (d) Hispanic, (e) Native Hawaiian, (f) Two or More Races, (g) White, or (h) Other. A ninth option permitted participants the opportunity to select the phrase, *I prefer not to answer*. Two hundred and sixty-four participants indicated they were White, and 84 indicated they were Black or African American. Only 10 indicated one of the other seven responses. Given the small number of those selecting outside of the two most popular responses, two categories for Ethnicity were used in further analyses for calculating answers to the research questions, White or Non-White. Non-White included all responses that indicated Black or African American and the 10 responses from those that selected either American Indian or Alaska Native, Hispanic, Native Hawaiian, Two or More Races, Other or preferred not to answer.

Table 4.3

*Professional Role and Ethnicity*

Principal		Assistant Principal	
159		199 <sup>note</sup>	
White	Non-White	White	Non-White

119	40	145	54
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*Note:* This sum excludes one respondent who selected the option of *I prefer not to answer*.

As shown in Table 4.3, 119 (74.8%) of principals and 145 (73.7%) of assistant principals identified themselves as *White*. Minority populations only represent approximately one-fourth of school leaders in the state where this study took place according to this study. According to the US Census (2017), the state's population is 31.5% Non-White which is approximately 6% more than the percentage of minority school leaders.

### *Experience*

How school leaders responded when asked how long they had been working in education and also how long they had been an administrator can be seen in Table 4-4.

Table 4-4

### *School Leaders' Experience*

	0-5 Years	5-10 Years	10-15 Years	15-20 Years	More than 20 years
In Education	3 (0.8%)	32 (8.9%)	73 (20.4%)	88 (24.6%)	162 (45.2%)
In Admin Role	129 (36.0 %)	92 (25.7%)	81 (22.6%)	42 (11.7%)	14 (3.9%)

As would be expected, school leaders indicated more experience in education than as an administrator. Over 90% of school leaders indicated they had more than 10 years of experience working in education, while less than 40% indicated they had more than 10 years of experience as an administrator.

### *Location*

Participants were also asked to provide the zip code for where they lived and also

the zip code for the school where they were employed. For the purpose of this study, the state was divided into three regions, *Upstate*, *Midlands*, and *Lowstate*. Zip Codes were used to determine in which county a school leader was employed. How school leaders reported their location according to the Zip Code of the school where they are currently employed can be seen in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5

*Location*

Upstate	Midlands	Lowstate
156	101	97

One hundred and fifty-six (43.6%) of the school leaders that responded to the survey indicated they were employed in school districts located in the *Upstate*. One hundred and one (28.2%) of school leaders indicated they worked in the *Midlands* area which is the region that includes the state capital and surrounding counties. Ninety-seven (27.1%) of the respondents to the study indicated they lived in the *Lowstate*, which includes areas closer to the coast. School leaders from 41 of the 46 counties in the state responded to the survey.

### **Research Question #1**

School leaders were asked to answer questions about their likelihood to participate in specific behaviors that indicate political engagement. These behaviors included voting, contacting policymakers, contributing to a political campaign, and being knowledgeable about policies that impact a school leader's professional role. The first research question was posed as follows:



What is the extent to which school leaders in a selected southeastern U.S. state perceive their levels of political engagement with the policy environments surrounding their professional roles?

The following sections will highlight how school leaders reported their likelihood to participate in behaviors indicative of a politically engaged individual (Cantijoch et al., 2016). Because of the importance of being knowledgeable about policy environments and the specific issues addressed by policies, school leaders' perceived levels of understanding and interest in policy will be highlighted before the findings about specific behaviors, such as, voting and contacting policymakers.

### Policy Knowledge

Being knowledgeable about the policies that impact a school leader's professional role is an important aspect of being able to effectively interpret and implement policies at the school level (Reichert, 2016; Abdelzadeh, et al., 2015; Carpenter & Brewer, 2014; McLaughlin, 1990). As shown in Table 4.6, school leaders self-reported their knowledge of policies created at the school, district, state, and federal levels of policymaking.

Table 4.6

#### *School Leaders' Understanding of Policies Impacting Public Education*

	Minimal Understanding	Moderate Understanding	Extensive Understanding
School Level Policies	4 (1.1%)	63 (17.6%)	291 (81.3%)
District Level Policies	6 (1.7%)	100 (27.9%)	252 (70.4%)
State Level Policies	32 (8.9%)	231 (64.5%)	95 (26.5%)

Federal Level Policies	77 (21.5%)	238 (66.5%)	43 (12.0%)
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School leaders' understanding of policy increases as policies are created closer to the school level. While the vast majority of school leaders indicated an extensive understanding of school and district policies, only 26.5% indicated an extensive understanding of state policies and only 12% indicated an extensive understanding of federal policies. However, as Table 4.7 shows, over 90% of school leaders indicated that policies created at the state level impact their professional roles either *A Lot* or *A Great Deal*. Over 75% of respondents indicated that policies created at the federal level impacted their professional roles as principals or assistant principals either *A Lot* or *A Great Deal*.

Table 4.7

*School Leaders' Perceptions of Policies' Impact on Professional Role*

	A Great Deal	A Lot	A Moderate Amount	A Little	None at All
School/District Level Policies	295 (82.4%)	49 (13.7%)	11 (3.1%)	2 (0.6%)	1 (0.3%)
State Level Policies	219 (61.2%)	110 (30.7%)	25 (7.0%)	3 (0.8%)	1 (0.3%)
Federal Level Policies	153 (42.7%)	122 (34.1%)	70 (19.6%)	12 (3.4%)	1 (0.3%)

The majority of responding school leaders reported that policies created at the school and district levels impacted their professional roles more than those created at the federal level. In their responses, shown in Table 4.7, they reported that that state-level

policies affected their roles from a *Great Deal* to *A Lot*, but, as displayed in Table 4.6, over 70% of school leaders indicated a range of understanding of state-level policies from *Minimal* to *Moderate*. Concerning federal policies, only 12% of school leaders selected the *Extensive Understanding* option.

### Political Engagement

A lack of policy knowledge often leads to a lower political engagement among citizens (Cantijoch et al., 2016; Furlong, 1998; Hays, 2015; Schneider & Ingram, 2003). For this study, school leaders could indicate their likelihood of engaging in political behaviors such as voting, contacting a policymaker, and financially contributing to policymaker's campaign. As can be seen in Table 4.8, school leaders selected one of five options about their likelihood to vote in federal and state-level elections.

Table 4.8

#### *School Leaders' Voting*

	Extremely Likely	Somewhat Likely	Neither Likely nor Unlikely	Somewhat Unlikely	Extremely Unlikely
Vote in Presidential Election Year	346 (96.6%)	10 (2.8%)	1 (0.3%)	1 (0.3%)	0 (0%)
Vote in Gubernatorial Election Year	291 (81.3%)	30 (8.4%)	15 (4.2%)	9 (2.5%)	13 (3.6%)
Vote in Primary Election	271 (75.7%)	76 (21.2%)	6 (1.7%)	2 (0.6%)	3 (0.8%)

In the southeastern state where the study took place, state level policymakers are elected during the midterm years of presidential (federal) election cycles. These school

leaders indicated their likelihood of voting in presidential elections at about a 15% higher rate than during the federal mid-term when state's governor is elected.

Policy knowledge is a predictor of how confident and willing a person may be to contact a policymaker at various levels of government (Reichert, 2016; Abdelzadeh, et al., 2015; McLaughlin, 1990). As indicated in Table 4.6, school leaders indicated they were more knowledgeable about policies created at the local level than they were about those created at the state or federal level. School leaders' likelihood to contact policymakers at the local, state, or federal level is highlighted in Table 4.9. A slight majority selected responses indicating their likelihood of contacting local (56.4%) and state-level (52.6%) policymakers than federal level policymakers (38.2%), but regardless of level, less than 20% selected the *Extremely Likely* to contact any policymaker.

Table 4.9

*School Leaders' Likelihood to Contact Policymaker*

	Extremely Likely	Somewhat Likely	Neither Likely nor Unlikely	Somewhat Unlikely	Extremely Unlikely
Contact Local Policymaker	64 (17.9%)	138 (38.5%)	66 (18.4%)	68 (19.0%)	22 (6.1%)
Contact State Level Policymaker	60 (16.8%)	128 (35.8%)	77 (21.5%)	66 (18.4%)	27 (7.5%)
Contact Federal Level Policymaker	47 (13.1%)	90 (25.1%)	93 (26.0%)	83 (23.2%)	45 (12.6%)

Another behavior that is indicative of a politically engaged individual is making a financial contribution to a policymaker's campaign. As indicated in Table 4.10, school leaders indicated they are not likely to financially contribute to a policymaker's

campaign. Regardless of local, state, or federal level, less than 25% of school leaders selected *Extremely Likely* or *Somewhat Likely* while over half selected *Somewhat Unlikely* or *Extremely Unlikely*.

Table 4.10

*School Leaders' Likelihood to Donate to Policymaker Campaign*

	Extremely Likely	Somewhat Likely	Neither Likely nor Unlikely	Somewhat Unlikely	Extremely Unlikely
Donate Local Policymaker	22 (6.1%)	54 (15.1%)	75 (20.9%)	84 (23.5%)	123 (34.4%)
Donate State Level Policymaker	19 (5.3%)	52 (14.5%)	71 (19.8%)	84 (23.5%)	132 (36.9%)
Donate Federal Level Policymaker	11 (3.1%)	45 (12.6%)	72 (20.1%)	87 (24.3%)	143 (39.9%)

According to the results of this study, school leaders in this state are very likely to participate in the simplest form of political engagement which is voting (Schneider & Ingram, 1993), but they are much less likely to participate in behaviors such as contacting policymakers. The school leaders' degree of understanding about policies decreases the further away the policy is created from the school, although school leaders did indicate that they believe all policies have an impact on their professional roles as principals or assistant principals.

### **Policy Aims**

At times, school leaders are asked to implement policies which either do not come with resources school leaders think should be provided in order to adequately implement the policy as intended (Cohen et al., 2007), or, even more detrimental to appropriate

implementation, the school leader disagrees with the aim of the specific policy (Brewer & Carpenter, 2014). School leaders were asked how often they were required to implement policies they disagree with and those results can be seen in Table 4.11.

School leaders indicated they are asked to implement state and federal policies they disagreed with more often than policies created at the school or district level. Over half of the school leaders (51.1%) indicated they are *Frequently* or *Always* required to implement state policies they disagree with and almost half (49.1%) indicated the same with federal policies.

Table 4.11

*Implement Policies School Leaders' Disagree With*

	Always	Frequently	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
School/District Level Policies	73 (20.4%)	69 (19.3%)	131 (36.6%)	78 (21.8%)	7 (2.0%)
State Level Policies	71 (19.8%)	112 (31.3%)	136 (38.0%)	36 (10.1%)	3 (0.8%)
Federal Level Policies	62 (17.3%)	114 (31.8%)	145 (40.5%)	35 (9.8%)	2 (0.6%)

This data is aligned with previous research indicating the frustration between school leaders and policymakers within the southeastern state where the study took place (Brewer et al., 2015; Werts et al., 2013). However, as was reported in Table 4.7, school leaders are also much more likely to communicate with policymakers at the local level. Communicating and interacting with policymakers can aid in the process of ensuring that all stakeholders understand the policy aims of specific policies (Cohen et al., 2007).

## Research Question #2

Research question #2 was posed as follows:

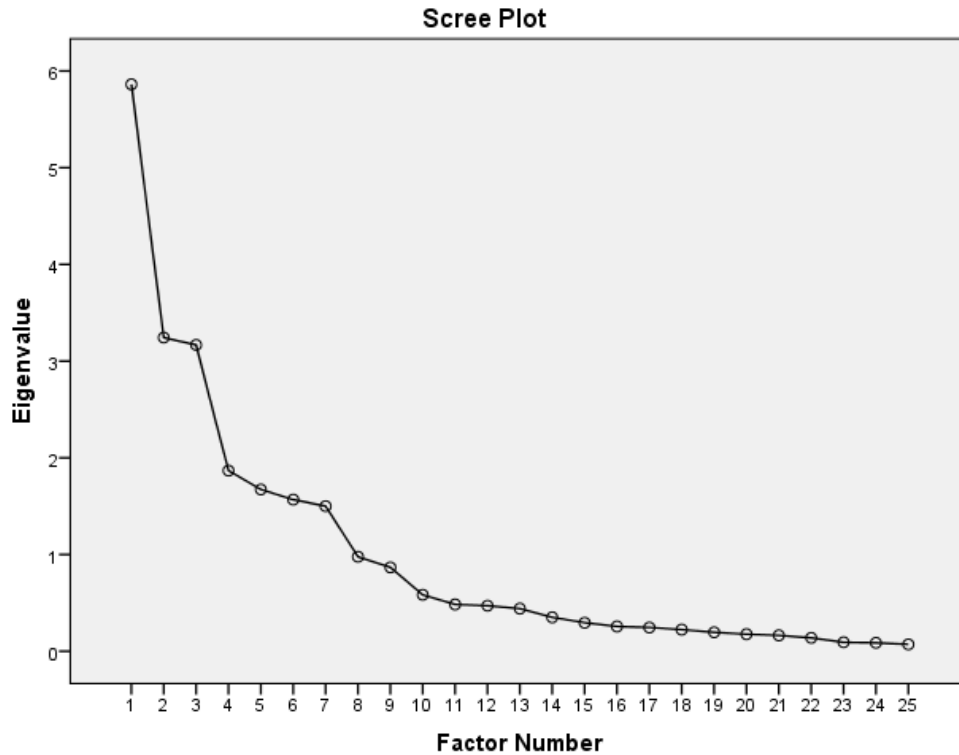
What demographic variables predict school leaders' perceptions about their levels of political engagement with the policy environments surrounding their professional roles in a state located in the southeastern United States?

To answer this question, several statistical steps were initiated using SPSS (2016) version 24. The first of these steps included conducting an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) (SPSS, 2016) to identify factors that comprise political engagement from the survey items among the 358 completed surveys. In addition, multiple regression models were used to determine whether demographic variables associated with a school leader's perception about his or her likelihood to be politically engaged.

The EFA produced a Kaiser-Meyer Olkin (KMO) of 0.747. A factor analysis is expected to yield reliable factors when the KMO is between 0.7 and 0.8 (Costello & Osborne, 2005). Three factors were extracted from the data after using the Scree Plot (shown in Figure 4-1) and the Pattern Matrix from SPSS. The Scree Plot shows a representation of the eigenvalues from the exploratory factor analysis. Typical guidance from methodologists, such as Costello and Osborne (2005), suggests that factors with larger eigenvalues have great importance than those with smaller eigenvalues. Using the scree plot (Figure 4.1), it was determined that three factors were most appropriate for this analysis of the data (Costello & Osborne, 2005). The three factors each had an eigenvalue greater than 3. Those three factors were designated as follows: (a) Political Participation (eigenvalue=5.862), (b) Policy Knowledge (eigenvalue=3.243), and (c) Political Efficacy (eigenvalue=3.167). These three factors became a separate outcome variable for one of three regression models with demographic variables used as independent variables.

Figure 4.1

Scree Plot



The three factors identified from the Scree Plot showed very little correlation with one another as can be seen in Table 4.12. As shown in Table 4.12, Factor 1 has a correlation value of 0.203 with Factor 2 and 0.191 with Factor 3. Factor 2 has a correlation value of 0.87 with Factor 3. These values indicate, that despite the higher eigenvalues, the factors have very little correlation with one another indicating a lack of relationship and collinearity between the three factors identified by the EFA.

Table 4.12

*EFA Factor Correlation Matrix*

Factor	1	2	3
1	1.000	.203	.191



2	.203	1.000	.087
3	.191	.087	1.000

The Pattern Matrix shown in Table 4.13 highlights the factors identified by the exploratory factor analysis conducted in SPSS that comprised political engagement, and identifies the survey items used to identify the three factors. Survey items were considered to be contributing to the identified factors with a value greater the 0.32 in the Pattern Matrix (Costello & Osborne, 2005; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). Items were removed from the EFA with a regression weight less than 0.32 because those items were not likely to be related to the other items that created the factor (Costello & Osborne, 2005).

Table 4.13

*EFA Pattern Matrix*

Survey Item	Political Participation	Policy Knowledge	Political Efficacy
CONTACT_local	.655	.216	-.014
CONTACT_state	.706	.191	-.027
CONTACT_fed	.710	.111	-.068
RESPOND_survey	.495	.198	-.033
DONATE_local	.720	-.069	.049
DONATE_state	.782	-.056	.006
DONATE_fed	.735	-.087	.026
READ_localchnng	.194	.550	-.066
READ_statechnng	.219	.587	-.083
READ_fedchnng	.275	.543	-.115
IMPACT_local	-.143	.398	.067
IMPACT_state	-.001	.484	-.027
IMPACT_fed	.069	.337	.009
INTEREST_school	-.154	.619	.168
INTEREST_local	-.119	.611	.176

INTEREST_state	.108	.663	.078
INTEREST_fed	.176	.538	.002
VALUE_school	-.161	.275	.525
VALUE_local	-.074	.161	.668
VALUE_state	.333	-.121	.631
VALUE_fed	.389	-.254	.470
RESPOND_school	-.220	.240	.518
RESPOND_local	-.156	.165	.645
RESPOND_state	.087	-.100	.736
RESPOND_fed	.174	-.192	.587

As can be seen in Table 4.14, the factor, Political Participation, consisted of the survey items that included: contacting policymakers at the local, state, and federal levels; donating money to candidates at the local, state, and federal levels; and whether school leaders were likely to respond to surveys from policymakers. The second factor, Policy Knowledge, included items that asked about interest in policies created at the local, state, and federal levels: items related to reading about policy changes; and items asking about the impact of policies created at the local, state, and federal levels. The third factor, Political Efficacy, consisted of items that asked school leaders about how policymakers valued their input at the local, state, and federal level along with items asking about how policymakers at the local, state, and federal level respond to student needs.

Table 4.14

*Factors Identified by EFA*

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION	POLICY KNOWLEDGE	POLITICAL EFFICACY
CONTACT_local	READ_localchng	VALUE_school
CONTACT_state	READ_statechng	VALUE_local
CONTACT_fed	READ_fedchng	VALUE_state
RESPOND_survey	IMPACT_local	VALUE_fed
DONATE_local	IMPACT_state	RESPOND_school

DONATE_state	IMPACT_fed	RESPOND_local
DONATE_fed	INTEREST_school	RESPOND_state
	INTEREST_local	RESPOND_fed
	INTEREST_state	
	INTEREST_fed	

---

Table 4.15 includes the descriptive statistics for the three factors identified by the EFA. On a scale of 1-5, school leaders indicated a score of 3.075 for Political Participation, Policy Knowledge of 1.369, and Political Efficacy of 2.73. The skew (1.235) and kurtosis (1.532) values for Policy Knowledge indicated that the distribution of the data is not normal for that factor and the small variance within Policy Knowledge indicated very little difference between how school leaders responded to items that comprised that factor in the EFA.

School leaders consistently indicated a higher likelihood to have an *Extensive Understanding* of school and local policies as opposed to state and federal policies. Two hundred ninety-one (81.3%) school leaders indicated an *Extensive Understanding* of school policies and 252 (70.4%) indicated the same about local policies while only 95 (26.5%) school leaders and 43 (12.0%) indicated an Extensive Understanding for state and federal policies. These findings skew the data for school leaders' policy knowledge which impacts the distribution of data needed for the assumption of normality.

Table 4.15

*Descriptive Statistics of EFA Factors*

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance	Skewness	Kurtosis
Political Participation	3.075	0.911	0.830	-0.103	-0.430

Policy Knowledge	1.369	0.372	0.138	1.235	1.532
Political Efficacy	2.730	0.662	0.438	0.133	0.482

---

After conducting the EFA and identifying the three factors that comprised political engagement using SPSS v. 24, multiple regression was used to determine if any association existed between a school leader's demographic variables and a school leader's perceived levels of political engagement. The multiple regression models used (a) professional role, (b) gender, (c) ethnicity, (d) location, (e) experience as an educator, (f) experience as an administrator and (g) the percentage of students receiving free or reduced lunch as independent variables. Each of the three factors, (a) Political Participation, (b) Policy Interest, and (c) Political Efficacy, identified by the exploratory factor analysis was used as separate dependent variable for each multiple regression analysis.

The next three sections will discuss the results of each of the three multiple regression analyses conducted using the three factors identified by the EFA that comprised a school leader's political engagement.

### **Political Participation**

For the first multiple regression analysis, Political Participation was used as the dependent variable. This factor consisted of the following items from the survey completed by school leaders: (a) CONTACT\_local, (b) CONTACT\_state, (c) CONTACT\_fed, (d) RESPOND\_survey, (e) DONATE\_local, (f) DONATE\_state, (g) DONATE\_fed. The analysis met the requirements for the assumptions of normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, independence of errors, and the absence of multi-collinearity

needed for multiple regression.

Table 4.16

*Factor 1: Political Participation Correlation and Significance*

r	R <sup>2</sup>	p-value	Statistically Significant
0.287	0.082	< 0.001	Yes

As shown in Table 4.16, a weak, but statistically significant correlation (Hinkle et al., 2003) of 0.287 exists between the independent variables and political participation. Because  $R^2 = 0.082$ , as shown in Table 4.16, it can be determined that demographic variables predict approximately 8% of a school leader's likelihood to participate in the behaviors identified by the exploratory factor analysis that comprise political participation.

Table 4.17 displays the details of the analyses completed on each of the demographic variables used as the independent variables during the multiple regression analysis with Political Participation as the dependent variable. A lack of collinearity among the independent variables is also observed due to the Tolerance values about 0.5 and approaching 1 (Liu, Kuang, Gong, & Hou, 2002). As Table 4.17 indicates, there is a weak relationship between the individual demographic variables and a school leader's political participation as indicated by the following values: (a)PROF\_ROLE ( $\beta = -0.100$ ); (b)GENDER ( $\beta = -0.224$ ); (c)ETHNICITY ( $\beta = -0.153$ ); (d)LOCATION ( $\beta = -0.139$ ); (e)EXP\_EDU ( $\beta = -0.035$ ); (f)EXP\_ADMIN ( $\beta = -0.125$ ); FREE\_RED ( $\beta = 0.049$ ).

Table 4.17

*Factor 1: Political Participation Multiple Regression Coefficients*

Variable	Beta	Significance	Tolerance
(Constant)	4.163	.000	
PROF_ROLE	-.100	.298	.806
GENDER	-.224	.022	.936
ETHNICITY	-.153	.186	.856
LOCATION	-.139	.021	.896
EXP_EDU	-.035	.479	.548
EXP_ADMIN	-.125	.023	.515
FREE_RED	.049	.329	.905

**Policy Knowledge**

Policy Knowledge was used as the dependent variable for the second multiple regression analysis. This factor consisted of the following items from the survey completed by school leaders: (a) READ\_localchng, (b) READ\_statechng, (c) READ\_fedchng, (d) IMPACT\_local, (e) IMPACT\_state, (f) IMPACT\_fed, (g) INTEREST\_school, (h)INTEREST\_local, (i)INTEREST\_state, and (j) INTEREST\_fed. The analysis met the requirements for the assumptions of linearity, homoscedasticity, independence of errors, and the absence of multi-collinearity needed for multiple regression, but did not meet the assumption for normality due to the skew and kurtosis values of the dependent variable used for this multiple regression analysis. The multiple regression analysis was conducted despite failing to meet the assumption for normality according to previous research by Poole and O'Farrell (1971) and Glass et al. (1972) who both stated that the assumption of normality does not have to be met in order to gain

useful information from a regression analysis.

Table 4.18

*Factor 2: Policy Knowledge Correlation and Significance*

r	R <sup>2</sup>	p-value	Statistically Significant
0.306	0.093	< 0.001	Yes

As shown in Table 4.18, a weak, but statistically significant correlation (Hinkle et al., 2003) of 0.306 exists (Hinkle et al., 2003). Because  $R^2 = 0.093$ , as shown in Table 4.18, it can be determined that demographic variables predict approximately 9% of a school leader's likelihood to participate in the behaviors identified by the exploratory factor analysis that comprise policy knowledge.

Table 4.19 displays the details of the analyses completed on each of the demographic variables used as the independent variables during the multiple regression analysis with Policy Knowledge as the dependent variable. A lack of collinearity among the independent variables is also observed due to the Tolerance values about 0.5 and approaching 1 (Liu et al., 2002). As shown in Table 4.19, there is a weak relationship between the individual demographic variables and a school leader's policy knowledge as indicated by the following values: (a)PROF\_ROLE ( $\beta = 0.085$ ); (b)GENDER ( $\beta = -0.158$ ); (c)ETHNICITY ( $\beta = -0.045$ ); (d)LOCATION ( $\beta = -0.022$ ); (e)EXP\_EDU ( $\beta = -0.027$ ); (f)EXP\_ADMIN ( $\beta = -0.008$ ); FREE\_RED ( $\beta = 0.010$ ).

Table 4.19

*Factor 2: Policy Knowledge Multiple Regression Coefficients*

Variable	Beta	Significance	Tolerance
(Constant)	1.635	.000	

PROF_ROLE	.085	.030	.806
GENDER	-.158	.000	.936
ETHNICITY	-.045	.335	.856
LOCATION	-.022	.369	.896
EXP_EDU	-.027	.172	.548
EXP_ADMIN	-.008	.708	.515
FREE_RED	.010	.613	.905

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### **Political Efficacy**

For the final multiple regression analysis, Political Efficacy was used as the dependent variable. This factor consisted of the following items from the survey completed by school leaders: (a) VALUE\_school, (b) VALUE\_local, (c) VALUE\_state, (d) VALUE\_fed, (e) RESPOND\_school, (f) RESPOND\_local, (g) RESPOND\_state, and (h)RESPOND\_fed. The analysis met the requirements for the assumptions of normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, independence of errors, and the absence of multi-collinearity needed for multiple regression.

As shown in Table 4.20, some correlation between the independent variables and political participation does exist, but it would be considered weak (Hinkle et al., 2003). Because  $R^2 = 0.044$  as shown in Table 4.20, it can be determined that demographic variables associate with approximately 4% of a school leader's likelihood to participate in the behaviors identified by the exploratory factor analysis that comprise political participation.



Table 4.20

*Factor 3: Political Efficacy Correlation and Significance*

r	R <sup>2</sup>	p-value	Statistically Significant
0.210	0.044	0.028	Yes

Table 4.21 displays the details of the analyses completed on each of the demographic variables used as the independent variables during the multiple regression analysis with Political Participation as the dependent variable. As Table 4.21 indicates, there is a weak relationship between the individual demographic variables and a school leader's political participation. A lack of collinearity among the independent variables is also observed due to the Tolerance values about 0.5 and approaching 1 (Liu et al., 2002). As shown in Table 4.21, there is a weak relationship between the individual demographic variables and a school leader's political efficacy as indicated by the following values: (a)PROF\_ROLE ( $\beta = -0.100$ ); (b)GENDER ( $\beta = -0.224$ ); (c)ETHNICITY ( $\beta = -0.153$ ); (d)LOCATION ( $\beta = -0.139$ ); (e)EXP\_EDU ( $\beta = -0.035$ ); (f)EXP\_ADMIN ( $\beta = -0.125$ ); FREE\_RED ( $\beta = 0.049$ ).

Table 4.21

*Factor 3: Political Efficacy Multiple Regression Coefficients*

Variable	Beta	Significance	Tolerance
(Constant)	4.163	.000	
PROF_ROLE	-.100	.298	.806
GENDER	-.224	.022	.936
ETHNICITY	-.153	.186	.856
LOCATION	-.139	.021	.896

EXP_EDU	-.035	.479	.548
EXP_ADMIN	-.125	.023	.515
FREE_RED	.049	.329	.905

## Summary

School leaders, as a whole, participate in behaviors indicative of someone who is slightly politically engaged, such as, voting in elections and keeping themselves somewhat knowledgeable about educational policies which they may implement in their professional roles as either principals or assistant principals. However, school leaders also indicated they are much less likely to participate in behaviors such as contacting policymakers or contributing to political campaigns, especially at the state or federal levels. After using EFA to identify three factors that comprise political engagement, it was determined that demographic variables such as professional role, gender, ethnicity, location, experience, and the percentage of students receiving free or reduced lunch fail to predict a school leader's political participation, policy knowledge, or political efficacy.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SUMMARY, DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS**

#### **Introduction**

Political engagement is defined as a school leader's knowledge about policies created at the local, state, or federal levels and their participation in specific behaviors such as voting, contacting policymakers at the local, state, or federal levels, reading about political trends in public education, and attending professional development opportunities about policies from various policy environments (Cantijoch et al., 2016; Whitely & Seyd, 2002). Politically engaged individuals that interact with policymakers can better articulate their needs and desires to policymakers according to rational policy theory (Kingdon, 2003; Ostrom, 1992; Zahariadis, 2014). According to Bryk (2015) and Pitre (2011), being engaged helps individuals whose behavior is directly influenced by policy, in this study school leaders, better understand how policymakers intend for policies to be implemented.

This quantitative descriptive study attempted to answer the following research questions:

- What is the extent to which school leaders in a selected southeastern U.S. state perceive their levels of political engagement with the policy environments surrounding their professional roles?
- What demographic variables predict school leaders' perceptions about their levels of political engagement with the policy environments surrounding their professional roles in a state located in the southeastern United States?

In order to answer the first research question, this study examined school leaders' levels of engagement with the policies surrounding their professional roles by surveying school leaders about specific behaviors indicative of being politically engaged. Using SPSS version 24, descriptive statistics were used to determine how politically engaged principals and assistant principals in one state in the southeastern U.S. were with the local, state, and federal policy environments that impact their professional roles.

In order to answer the second research question, the study also explored whether specific demographic variables were associated with a school leader's perceived levels of political engagement by conducting an EFA on the data collected. Three factors that comprised political engagement were identified from the analysis. These factors were Political Participation, Policy Knowledge, and Political Efficacy. After these factors were identified, multiple linear regression was used to determine if any demographic variables predicted a school leader's level of engagement by using the factors that resulted from the EFA as dependent variables.

Three hundred and fifty-eight school leaders from 41 of the 46 counties in the state responded to the survey that was sent to each public school principal and assistant principal in the state where the study took place. The survey consisted of questions that asked about demographic characteristics and Likert Scale questions that asked about the school leaders' participation in behaviors that are indicative of politically engaged individuals.

### **Summary of the Study**

School leaders must be engaged with the policy process in order to more effectively interpret the meaning of local, state, and federal policies in order for the

policies to be implemented effectively (Brewer, 2011; Marks & Nance, 2007; McLaughlin, 1990; Sherman, 2008). According to rational policy theory (Kingdon, 2003; Ostrom, 1992; Zahariadis, 2014), politically engaged individuals that interact with policymakers can better articulate their needs and desires to policymakers. Being engaged helps both policymakers and those individuals whose behavior is directly influenced by policy understand better how policymakers intend for policies to be implemented (Bryk, 2015; Pitre, 2011). As school leaders, being politically engaged includes behaviors such as voting; contacting policymakers at the local, state, or federal levels; reading about political trends in public education; and contributing to political campaigns for policymakers (Cantijoch et al., 2016; Furlong, 1998). School leaders can influence policy and contribute to the implementation of policies more effectively when they are politically engaged (Marks & Nance, 2007; McLaughlin, 1990; Sherman, 2008)

In this study, theories of political participation were used to identify variables such as an individual's socioeconomic status, level of education, ethnicity, and political efficacy that predict an individual's willingness to participate and be politically engaged (Brady et al., 1995; Galston, 2001; Whitely & Seyd, 2002). The traditionalistic political culture where the study took place is also a predictor of a specific individual's lack of engagement with policy environments that impact their professional role as school leaders (Elazar, 1984).

### **Research Question #1**

The simplest form of political engagement is voting (Abdelzadeh et al., 2015; Cantijoch et al., 2016; Schneider & Ingram, 1993; Sabatier, 1991). In the state where this study took place, the governor is elected during the midterm elections between

presidential elections. School leaders indicated they were more likely to vote in presidential elections than gubernatorial elections or primary elections, despite the fact that school leaders also indicated policies created by local and state policymakers had a larger impact on their professional roles as school leaders, as shown in Table 4.7.

Of the 358 school leaders that responded to the survey, over 80% indicated that local policies impacted their professional role *A Great Deal* while only 43% indicated that federal policies have a similar impact. Local and primary elections are when policymakers that create local policies are elected. However, while over 96% of school leaders indicated they were *Extremely Likely* to vote in a presidential election, only three-fourths of school leaders indicated they were *Extremely Likely* to vote in primary or local elections. If school leaders do not vote in the elections that elect the policymakers that create policies that have a high impact on their professional role, there could potentially be a higher likelihood of policies created that school leaders do not agree with.

While the vast majority of school leaders indicated they were either *Extremely Likely* to vote in elections, less than 20% responded they would be *Extremely Likely* to contact a policymaker at any level of policymaking, local, state, or federal. Despite the fact that state and federal governments are more involved in education policymaking than ever before (Carpenter & Brewer, 2014; Cohen & Moffitt, 2011; Verstegen, 2011; Boyd & Crowson, 2002; Feuerstein, 2002), school leaders are not contacting policymakers at the state or federal level on a consistent basis. School leaders also indicated they were much less likely to make a financial contribution to a policymaker's campaign, regardless of level. While school leaders in this southeastern state indicated a higher likelihood to

vote, they were much less likely to participate in behaviors indicative of individuals that are politically engaged.

However, the traditionalistic political culture of the state could also be a contributor to the lack of political participation. In states with traditionalistic political culture, policymaking is generally a top-down phenomenon with outside input only coming from appointed stakeholders. Voter turnout and political participation has continued to be lower in states Elazar defined as traditionalistic compared to moralistic or individualistic (Chamberlain, 2013; Dincer & Johnston, 2014; Elazar, 1984; Wirt et al., 1985).

School leaders indicated more of a lack of understanding of policies created at the state and federal level than those created at the local level. Based on previous research from Reichert (2016) and Hays (2015), this would indicate a lower likelihood for school leaders to participate in behaviors to impact the policies created at the state and federal levels that impact a school leader's professional role due to the lower level of knowledge, as indicated in Table 4.6. This lack of knowledge could be a reason school leaders were less likely to contact policymakers, donate to a political campaign, and participate in political discussion. Without participation in these behaviors, school leaders and policymakers lack the interactions that lead to successful policy implementation (Desimone, 2006; Frick & Faircloth, 2007).

Without an extensive understanding of policies, school leaders are also less likely to participate in other behaviors indicative of being politically engaged (Abdelzadeh et al., 2015; Carpenter & Brewer, 2014; Hays, 2015; Reichert, 2016). Because more than

70% of school leaders indicated a lack of *Extensive Understanding* of state policies and more than 85% indicated less than an *Extensive Understanding* of federal policies, it helps to explain why school leaders also indicated they were less likely to contact state level and federal level policymakers.

Table 5.1

*School Leaders' Perceptions of the Degree Policymakers Value Their Input*

	Great Deal	A Lot	Moderate Amount	A Little	None at All
School Level	195	75	61	23	4
Local Level	106	122	74	45	11
State Level	16	46	118	111	67
Federal Level	11	21	65	91	170

School leaders indicated their input is less likely to be valued by policymakers at the state and federal level than at the school and local levels. Educational leaders and policymakers have blamed one another for the failures of education policies within the state (Werts et al., 2013), which has contributed to an unwillingness to advocate for or participate in the education policy environment. As shown in Table 5.1, school leaders indicated they felt state and federal policymakers do not value their input into policies that impact their professional role as school leaders. According to research on political culture and theories of political participation, individuals are less likely to be politically engaged if they feel policymakers do not value their input (Vigoda, 2002). Perhaps, this



combined with a lack of knowledge about state and federal policies is why school leaders, as a whole, are less engaged at the state and federal level.

### **Research Question #2**

Using an EFA, three factors that comprised political engagement were identified from the survey items used for this study. Factor 1 was Political Participation, Factor 2 was Policy Knowledge, and Factor 3 was Political Efficacy. After conducting the exploratory factor analysis on the survey items that indicated whether an individual is politically engaged, a multiple regression analysis was used to determine if demographic variables were associated with a school leader's perceived levels of political engagement.

Historically, in the state where the study took place, and according to theories of political participation and the traditionalistic political culture that exists within the state, variables such as an individual's socioeconomic status, level of education, ethnicity, and political efficacy can predict that individual's willingness to be politically engaged (Boyd et al., 1995; Cantijoch et al., 2015; Sloam, 2014; Verba et al., 1993; Whitely & Seyd, 2002). However, according to the data resulting from the regression models conducted in this study, demographic variables such as gender, ethnicity, location, experience, and professional role are very weak predictors of political engagement (Hinkle, et al., 2003) of a school leader's levels of political engagement in the state where the study took place.

These findings indicate that school leaders within the state in which the study

was conducted are not politically engaged. Based on these findings, school leaders could possibly be identified as another example of a segment of the population from this specific state that feel marginalized and frustrated to the point where they are not willing to participate in behaviors indicative of politically engaged individuals, especially at the state and federal levels of policymaking.

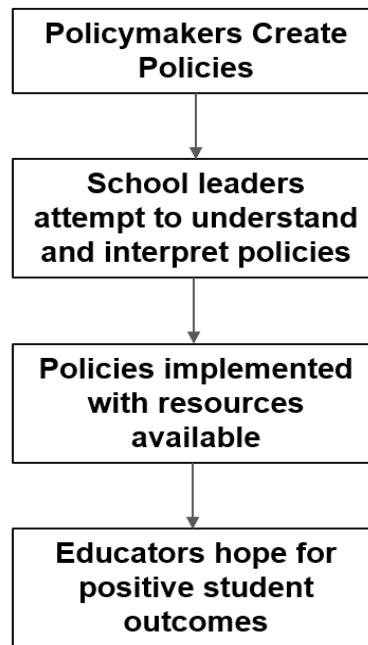
The traditionalistic political culture combined with the historical marginalization of underrepresented segments of the population in this state (Werts et al., 2013) could contribute to the explanation for why school leaders are not politically engaged no matter their gender, ethnicity, location, experience, or professional role. The findings from this study would support research that shows that individuals that feel marginalized are not politically engaged in states with traditionalistic political cultures (Elazar, 1984; Fitzpatrick & Hero, 1988). Despite previous research that indicates school districts in specific areas of the state lack resources and student achievement fails to compare to students from other locations in the state (Hein, 2017 Myers, 2015; Werts et al., 2013), location and other demographic variables did not significantly predict a school leader's levels of political engagement.

As illustrated in Figure 2-2, when school leaders interact with policymakers, there is a higher likelihood that policymakers and school leaders' policy aims will align, and that necessary resources will be provided for school leaders to implement policies as intended. According to theories of political participation and rational policy theory

(Ostrom, 1992; Sabatier, 2007), policymakers depend upon those impacted by the policies they create to be able to effectively articulate their intentions and implement policies at the local level. In education, policymakers depend upon school leaders to effectively perform this task by behaving as street-level bureaucrats (Cohen et al., 2007; Hill, 2003; Koyama, 2014; Weatherley & Lipsky, 1977). Yet, this process cannot be accomplished without political engagement from those tasked with this responsibility (Brandt, 1979; Kafka, 2009; Sabatier, 1988; Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993). The collaboration and interaction that occurs when school leaders are politically engaged is critical to effective policy implementation (Louis & Robinson, 2012; Sherman, 2008) which can often lead to positive outcomes for students (Pitre, 2011).

As shown in Figure 5-1, when school leaders are not politically engaged, school leaders are left to interpret and implement policies with the resources available to the best of their abilities (Ball, 1998; Cohen et al., 2007). The process is more linear when school leaders fail to be politically engaged. This figure highlights the process as it appears to be occurring in the state where this study took place due to the lack of interaction between school leaders and policymakers, especially at the state and federal

**Figure 5.1.** Conceptual Framework Without School Leaders' Political Engagement



levels.

As illustrated in Figure 5.1, school leaders attempt to understand and interpret policies when a lack of political engagement exists. Without engagement from school leaders, policymakers may not provide the necessary resources or understand school leaders' capacity for using the resources provided in order to implement policies with fidelity as policymakers intend (Bryk, 2015; Cohen et. al, 2007). Perhaps, this is why certain subgroups of the population in this southeastern state continue to score well below other subgroups on academic achievement tests (Truitt, 2009; Werts et al., 2013). A lack of engagement also leads to the culture of frustration that Knoeppel et al. (2009), Myers (2015), and Werts et al. (2013) referred to. Frustration between policymakers and school leaders will likely continue to exist without political engagement from all stakeholders involved in a student's education especially school leaders (Pitre, 2011).

Research on theories of citizens' political participation has previously indicated that demographic variables such as gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, location, and age can predict an individual's political engagement (Brady et al., 1995; Fowler & Kam, 2007; Hayes, 2015; Sloam, 2014; Vigoda, 2002). According to the results of this study, in this southeastern state, these variables were not significant predictors of a school leader's political participation, knowledge, or efficacy. The results of this study indicate that school leaders, as a group, are not politically engaged especially at the state and federal level.

### **Further Research**

This study indicates school leaders in this state have low levels of political engagement especially when behaviors such as contacting policymakers and contributing to political campaigns are considered. School leaders also indicated they felt that their input was not valued by policymakers at the state and federal level. These findings are significant, because when school leaders are more engaged with the policy environments surrounding their professional role, they are able to more adequately interpret and implement policy as policymakers intend (Cohen et al., 2007; Elmore, 2006; Marks & Nance, 2007).

Future research is needed to examine policymakers' perceptions of the engagement of school leaders in the education policy environments impacting public education that could potentially lead to encouraging school leaders to participate in the

behaviors indicative of a politically engaged individual. A study on the levels of political engagement of school leaders in other states with what Elazar (1980) defines as moralistic or individualistic political cultures could also show if a state's political culture influences the political engagement of school leaders. The important role of school leaders in policymaking has been consistently debated and examined (Cohen et al., 2007; Lindle & Mawhinney, 2003), and will need to continue to be researched as long as educators depend upon policymakers in state capitals and in Washington, DC to write effective policy (Brandt, 1979; Sabatier, 1988). However, as Spillane and Kenney (2012) stated, the role of the school leader administrator in policy implementation has gone largely ignored.

A quantitative study on policymakers' perceptions similar to this study would be especially useful in determining the value for collaboration and interaction during the policymaking process in order to promote more political engagement from stakeholders. Future qualitative research could also be conducted to investigate why school leaders fail to communicate with policymakers and specifically why they feel their input is not valued by policymakers at the state and federal levels. Conducting interviews with both policymakers and school leaders can help researchers to understand this relationship and determine effective ways for practitioners to be politically engaged.

## **Conclusion**

The important role of the administrator in policymaking has been consistently

debated and examined (Cohen et al., 2007; Lindle & Mawhinney, 2003), and will need to continue to be researched as long as educators depend upon policymakers in state capitals and in Washington, DC to write effective policy (Brandt, 1979; Sabatier, 1988). However, as Spillane and Kenney (2012) stated the role of the school level administrator in policy implementation has not been researched as thoroughly as other responsibilities of a school leader.

In this state, school leaders, as a whole, are willing to vote, but they are much less likely to participate in other behaviors that are indicative of a politically engaged individual. Demographic variables such as gender, ethnicity, location, experience, and professional role do not predict a school leader's level of engagement. School leaders reported a lack of extensive knowledge about policies developed at the state and federal levels, which can lead to lower levels of engagement. Despite the extensive demands and expectations placed on school leaders, it is imperative that they find time to become more knowledgeable about the policies that impact their professional role as principals or assistant principals so they can better articulate their needs and expectations to policymakers (Carpenter & Brewer, 2014; Cohen & Moffitt, 2011; Honig & Hatch, 2004; Louis & Robinson, 2012; Reichert, 2016).

School leaders indicated a higher likelihood to contact policymakers at the local level as opposed to the state and federal level of policymaking. However, according to data from this study, demographic variables such as race, gender, location, years of

experience, and the percentage of students receiving free or reduced lunch did not predict a school leader's level of political engagement with the policies that impact their professional roles in this state. This could be due to the overall political culture that exists in this state, a lack of knowledge about the policies they are responsible for implementing, or simply a reflection of the perceived lack of support felt by school leaders from policymakers at the state and federal level.

As public education continues to become more of a political issue at the local, state and federal levels (Verstegen, 2011), school leaders need to be engaged in the policy environments that impact their professional roles because they are ultimately responsible for implementing policies at the school level. The implications for this study could also be important for the programs that prepare school leaders and the scholars that create the standards for school leadership. School leaders must be given strategies to help them become more politically engaged, especially in states with traditionalistic political cultures, where policymakers do not always value the input of those directly affected by policies.

Principals and assistant principals must be knowledgeable about the policies they are responsible for implementing and willing to be politically engaged despite the political culture in the state where they live and work. More research is still required to better understand the critical role school leaders have in the interpretation and implementation of education policies and how to create more effective policies that



ultimately lead to improved outcomes for all students, especially in this southeastern state.

## APPENDICES

## Appendix A

### IRB Approval

Dear Dr. Klar,

The Clemson University Office of Research Compliance reviewed the protocol titled **“School Level Administrators’ Engagement in Education Policy Environments”** using exempt review procedures and a determination was made on December 20, 2017 that the proposed activities involving human participants qualify as **Exempt under category B2** in accordance with federal regulations 45 CFR 46.101, <http://media.clemson.edu/research/compliance/irb/exemption-categories.pdf>.

No further action, amendments, or IRB oversight of the protocol is required except in the following situations:

1. Substantial changes made to the protocol that could potentially change the review level. Researchers who modify the study purpose, study sample, or research methods and instruments in ways not covered by the exempt categories will need to submit an expedited or full board review application.
2. Occurrence of unanticipated problem or adverse event; any unanticipated problems involving risk to subjects, complications, and/or adverse events must be reported to the Office of Research Compliance immediately.
3. Change in Principal Investigator (PI)

All research involving human participants must maintain an ethically appropriate standard, which serves to protect the rights and welfare of the participants. This involves obtaining informed consent and maintaining confidentiality of data. Research related records should be retained for a minimum of three (3) years after completion of the study.

The Clemson University IRB is committed to facilitating ethical research and protecting the rights of human subjects. Please contact us if you have any questions and use the IRB number and title when referencing the study in future correspondence.

All the best,  
Nalinee

**Nalinee Patin, CIP**  
**IRB Administrator**  
**OFFICE OF RESEARCH COMPLIANCE**  
Clemson University, Division of Research  
391 College Avenue, Suite 406, Clemson, SC 29631, USA  
**P:** 864-656-0636  
[www.clemson.edu/research](http://www.clemson.edu/research)

## Appendix B

Dear South Carolina Public School Leaders:

My name is Seth Young. I am the principal at Wren High School in Anderson County located in the upstate of South Carolina. I am also a doctoral student at Clemson University.

Dr. Hans Klar and I would like to invite you to take part this research study. Dr. Klar is an associate professor at Clemson University. The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of how politically engaged school leaders are and identify factors that impact their levels of political engagement with the policy environments that impact public education.

I hope you are willing to give up just a few minutes to complete this anonymous survey by Monday, February 12. You can begin the survey by clicking [here](#).

If the link does not work, please copy and paste the following url into your web browser. ([http://clemsoneducation.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_3qslny6r1rRbCaV](http://clemsoneducation.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3qslny6r1rRbCaV))

Thank you so much for your time and participation in this study.

Sincerely,

Seth Young  
Clemson University Doctoral Candidate

## Appendix C

Dear South Carolina Public School Leaders:

My name is Seth Young. I am the principal at Wren High School in Anderson County located in the upstate of South Carolina. I am also a doctoral student at Clemson University.

On February 2, I sent an email which included a link to a survey I am conducting as part of my dissertation. Thank you so much to those of you who completed the survey. If you have not yet had a chance to complete the anonymous survey, you can begin the survey by clicking [here](#).

If the link above does not work, please copy and paste the following url into your web browser. ([https://clemsoneducation.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_3qslny6r1rRbCaV](https://clemsoneducation.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3qslny6r1rRbCaV))

The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of how politically engaged school leaders are and identify factors that impact their levels of political engagement with the policy environments that impact public education. It should only take you about five to ten minutes to complete the survey.

I hope you will be able to complete this anonymous survey by Friday, February 23.

Thank you so much for your time and participation in this study.

Sincerely,

Seth Young  
Clemson University Doctoral Candidate

## Appendix D

### Political Engagement Survey

Information about Being in a Research Study Clemson University

#### **School Level Administrators' Engagement in Education Policy Environments**

**Description of the Study and Your Part in It** Dr. Hans Klar and Seth Young would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Dr. Klar is an associate professor at Clemson University. Seth Young is a graduate student at Clemson University, who is conducting this study with the help of Dr. Klar. The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of school leaders' levels of engagement with the policy environment surrounding public education along with the factors that may influence their levels of policy engagement. Your part in the study would be to respond to questions in an anonymous online survey. It will take you about five to ten minutes to be in this study.

**Risks and Discomforts** We do not know of any risks or discomforts to you in this study.

**Possible Benefits** We do not know of any way you would benefit directly from taking part in this study. However, this research may help us to understand how to encourage school level administrators to be more engaged with the policy environments that impact public education and how to better influence policy that would lead to better student outcomes.

**Protection of Privacy and Confidentiality** We will do everything we can to protect your privacy and confidentiality. We will not tell anybody outside of the research team that you were in this study or what information we collected about you in particular. All data collected will be kept confidential and saved on a password protected computer in accordance with Clemson University policy.

**Choosing to Be in the Study** You do not have to be in this study. You may choose not to take part and you may choose to stop taking part at any time. You will not be punished in any way if you decide not to be in the study or to stop taking part in the study.

**Contact Information** If you have any questions or concerns about this study or if any problems arise, please contact Dr. Hans Klar at Clemson University at 864-656-5091. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights in this research study, please contact the Clemson University Office of Research Compliance (ORC) at 864-656-0636 or [irb@clemson.edu](mailto:irb@clemson.edu). If you are outside of the Upstate South Carolina area, please use the ORC's toll-free number, 866-297-3071. Clicking on the "agree" button indicates that: • You have read the above information • You voluntarily agree to

participate • You are at least 18 years

You may print a copy of this informational letter for your files.

☐ I AGREE (1)

---

Q1 What is your professional role in your school?

☐ Principal (1)

☐ Assistant Principal (2)

☐ Other (3)

---

If you selected other, describe your professional role.

\_\_\_\_\_

---

Q2 What is your gender?

☐ Male (1)

☐ Female (2)

☐ I prefer not to answer (3)

---

Q3 What is your ethnicity?

- ☐ American Indian or Alaska Native (1)
  - ☐ Asian (2)
  - ☐ Black or African American (3)
  - ☐ Hispanic (4)
  - ☐ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (5)
  - ☐ Two or More Races (6)
  - ☐ White (7)
  - ☐ Other (8)
  - ☐ I prefer not to answer (9)
- 

Q4 What would best describe the school where you are employed?

- ☐ High School (grades 9-12) (1)
  - ☐ Middle School (grades 6-8) (2)
  - ☐ Elementary School (grades K-5) (3)
  - ☐ Primary School (grades K-2) (4)
  - ☐ Other (5)
- 

If you selected other, please describe the school where you are employed.

---



Q5 What is the zip code for the school where you are employed?

---

Q17 What is the zip code where you live?

---

Q18 Do you reside in the attendance zone for the school where you are employed?

☐ Yes (1)

☐ No (2)

Q6 What percentage of students qualify for Free/Reduced lunch in the school where you are employed?

☐ 0% - 25% (1)

☐ 26% - 50% (2)

☐ 51% - 75% (3)

☐ 76% - 100% (4)

Q8 How many years of experience do you have working in education?

- ☐ 0 - 5 years (1)
  - ☐ 6 - 10 years (2)
  - ☐ 11 - 15 years (3)
  - ☐ 16 - 20 years (4)
  - ☐ 21 - 25 years (5)
  - ☐ More than 25 years (6)
- 

Q9 How many years of experience do you have in administration?

- ☐ 0 -5 years (1)
  - ☐ 6 - 10 years (2)
  - ☐ 11 - 15 years (3)
  - ☐ 16 - 20 years (4)
  - ☐ 21 - 25 years (5)
  - ☐ More than 25 years (6)
- 

Q10 Are you a member of a professional organization?

- ☐ Yes (1)
  - ☐ No (2)
- 

If yes, which organization(s)?

---

Q12 How likely are you to participate in the following behaviors?

	Extremely likely (1)	Somewhat likely (2)	Neither likely nor unlikely (3)	Somewhat unlikely (4)	Extremely unlikely (5)
Vote in Presidential Election Year (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Vote in Gubernatorial Election Year (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Vote in Primary Election (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Contact Local Policymaker (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Contact State Level Policymaker (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Contact Federal Level Policymaker (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Respond to Survey from Policymaker (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Donate Money to a Local Political Candidate (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Donate Money to a State Level Political Candidate (9)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Donate Money to a Federal Level Political Candidate (10)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Read Email about Potential Changes in Local Education Policies (11)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Read Email about Potential Changes in State Education Policies (12)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Read Email about  
Potential Changes in  
Federal Education  
Policies (13)

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Q13 Which of the following statements best describes your understanding about policies that impact public education?

	I have a Minimal Understanding (1)	I have a Moderate Understanding (2)	I have an Extensive Understanding (3)
Policies created at school level (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Policies created at the district level (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Policies created at the state level (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Policies created at the federal level (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q14 Please rate how much polices written at different levels of government impact your professional role in your school?

	A great deal (1)	A lot (2)	A moderate amount (3)	A little (4)	None at all (5)
Local/District Policies (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
State Policies (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Federal Policies (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q15 As a principal/assistant principal, how often are you required to implement policies created at different levels of government that you do not agree with?

	Always (1)	Frequently (2)	Sometimes (3)	Rarely (4)	Never (5)
Local/District Level Policies (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
State Level Policies (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Federal Policies (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q16 Please rate how much you agree with the following statements.

	A great deal (1)	A lot (2)	A moderate amount (3)	A little (4)	None at all (5)
I am interested in school level policy decisions that impact public education in the school district where I am employed. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am interested in local/district level policy decisions that impact public education in the school district where I am employed. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am interested in state level policy decisions that impact public education. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am interested in federal policy decisions that impact public education. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My input is valued by policymakers at the school level that impact public education in the school where I am employed. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My input is valued by policymakers at the local/district level that impact public education in the school where I am employed. (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My input is valued by policymakers at the state level. (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My input is valued by policymakers at the federal level. (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Overall, I feel the policies created at the school level respond to the needs of my students. (9)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Overall, I feel the policies created by the local government and school district responds to the needs of my students. (10)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Overall, I feel the policies created by the state government responds to the needs of my students. (11)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Overall, I feel the policies created by the United States' Federal Government responds to the needs of my students. (12)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## Appendix D

### *Political Engagement Survey Questions and Sources*

How likely are you to participate in the following behaviors?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vote</li> </ul>	Kowalski et al., 2011 Abdelzadeh, 2015
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contact Policymaker</li> </ul>	Kowalski, et al., 2011 Reichert, 2016 Willman, 2015
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respond to Policymaker</li> </ul>	Kowalski, et al., 2011 Reichert, 2016
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read about Change in Policy</li> </ul>	Doud & Keller, 1998 Kowalski, et al., 2011 Reichert, 2016
Which of the following statements best describes your understanding about policies that impact public education?	Doud & Keller, 1998 Kowalski, et al., 2011 Reichert, 2016
Please rate how much policies written at different levels of government impact your professional role in your school?	Doud & Keller, 1998 Kowalski, et al., 2011
As a principal/assistant principal, how often are you required to implement policies created at different levels of government that you do not agree with?	Doud & Keller, 1998 Brewer & Carpenter, 2014
Please rate how much you agree with the following statements.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interested in school level policy decisions</li> </ul>	Doud & Keller, 1998 Kowalski, et al., 2011
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interested in district level policy decisions</li> </ul>	Doud & Keller, 1998 Kowalski, et al., 2011



• Interested in state level policy decisions	Doud & Keller, 1998 Kowalski, et al., 2011
• Interested in federal level policy decisions	Doud & Keller, 1998 Kowalski, et al., 2011
• Input is valued by policymakers at local level	Doud & Keller, 1998 Kowalski, et al., 2011 Willman, 2015
• Input is valued by policymakers at state level	Doud & Keller, 1998 Kowalski, et al., 2011 Willman, 2015
• Input is valued by policymakers at federal level	Doud & Keller, 1998 Kowalski, et al., 2011 Willman, 2015
• Local policies respond to needs of students	Doud & Keller, 1998 Kowalski, et al., 2011 Willman, 2015
• State policies respond to needs of students	Doud & Keller, 1998 Kowalski, et al., 2011 Willman, 2015
• Federal policies respond to needs of students	Doud & Keller, 1998 Kowalski, et al., 2011

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